

DIVA PERFORMATIVITY:
FEMALE BODY AND VOICE THROUGH EURO-CLASSICAL VOCAL
PEDAGOGY

A Thesis

by

HANNAH P. ADAMY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Chair of Committee,	Kirsten Pullen
Committee Members,	Harris Berger
	Kimberly Kattari
	Daniel Humphrey
Head of Department,	Donnalee Dox

May 2015

Major Subject: Performance Studies

Copyright 2015 Hannah P. Adamy

ABSTRACT

Opera divas are stereotypically temperamental, but many singers learn diva behaviors through Euro-classical vocal pedagogy. Two conditions of opera vocal training contribute to performances of diva identity. First, opera singers are intimately tied to their characters through the music; they develop their voices in order to perform that music. Secondly, characters, thus opera divas, exist forever in their most excessive, vulnerable states. Consequently, the diva persona is not innate, but a Butlerian performativity. In this thesis, I explore how Euro-classical vocal practice marks and teaches heteronormativity in female opera singers. In addition, I survey how Euro-classical vocal training informs current opera divas' relationships to the institution of Euro-classical opera throughout their singing career.

In my critique, I use contemporary events in opera, vocal pedagogical texts, ethnography, and my own embodied knowledge informed by my Euro-classical vocal training. I will first detail the many facets that challenge a unified "diva" persona by considering past methods used to theorize "diva" and the legacy of the diva in the Euro-classical music tradition. I continue by analyzing vocal pedagogical texts, detailing the many ways teachers, composers, and singers trained and train the voice, and thus train the diva persona. Finally, I consider how three singers' rhetorically construct themselves using the diva image as reference. I do this in order to explain the many ways in which Euro-classical vocal pedagogy problematically relegates the female body and voice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Kirsten Pullen, whose candor and intellect shepherded me through this research. Thanks to Dr. Harris Berger for his enthusiasm, interest, and attention to detail. I also thank Drs. Kimberly Kattari and Daniel Humphrey for their valuable feedback and support. Additionally, I want to extend my gratitude to Dr. Judith Hamera, who first taught me about ethnography and how to talk about power, and Dr. Jayson Beaster-Jones, who introduced me to the concept of vocality.

Thank you to the singers who acted as my interlocutors. They graciously let me ask them impossible questions, and then replied in thoughtful and provocative ways. Being critical of my own artistic tradition is frustrating and confusing, but I hope my critiques resonate with the growing literature challenging sonic hierarchies. I also thank Andrea Imhoff for introducing me to Emily Pulley, and both her, Melissa Hronek, and the 2013-2014 TAMU Voice Studio for graciously allowing a fledgling ethnographer into their space.

Furthermore, I thank my graduate cohort, whose support remains an invaluable part of my time at A&M. I especially want to thank Bridget Conlon Liddell, who challenges me to think bravely and compassionately about my personhood. Finally, I thank my family and friends for reminding me that intellect means nothing unless it moves the body to work toward a more livable world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
CHAPTER	
I	INTRODUCTION..... 1
	Defining “Diva:” Virtuosity, Vocality, and Performativity 4
	Context and Intervention 8
	Interrogating Power..... 11
II	DISCOURSE AND THE DIVA: CASTRATI, BREECH ROLES, AND THE POLITICS OF EXCESS 15
	In the Shadow of the Castrati: Women’s Emergence in Opera..... 17
	Power and the Erotics of the Diva Voice 20
	Three Fetishizing Shifts: Connecting Opera and Vocal Pedagogy 23
	Fatness, Weight Loss, and the Diva Body 27
	Salome, a Case Study: The Singers Become their Characters 30
	The Diva and Sound Recording 37
	Conclusion..... 41
III	PROHIBITION THROUGH HETERONORMATIVE DISCOURSE IN VOICE TRAINING MANUALS 44
	“Diagnosing the Self”..... 46
	Female Voices and Roles in Professional Opera 52
	The Dangers of Voice Crossing 56
	Conclusion..... 64
IV	“DIVAS” SPEAK: “DIVA” IN NARRATIVE AND CONCLUSIONS 67
	The Singers..... 69
	Narrative and the Pamparic Body 72

How Singers Experience Euro-classical Vocal Institution	
Restrictions	74
How Singers Relegate Others	79
“The Diva” and How Singers Understand Themselves	85
Conclusions: The End of the Diva	89
REFERENCES	93

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Opera diva Deborah Voigt, a Wagnerian soprano at the peak of her career, was fired for being too fat to fit into a little black dress. After Covent Garden casting director Peter Katona cancelled her contract in 2004 for *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the Royal Opera House invited (a slimmer) Voigt back to star in their 2008 production. With the 2004 scandal burned in opera critics and fans' memories, Voigt and her publicist staged a cheeky publicity stunt. They released a video on YouTube called "Deborah Voigt: The Return of the Little Black Dress," which mocks the firing as well as the flurries of opinions that rose after the incident. The video begins with a camera pan down the corridor of Voigt's apartment building in New York. It moves closer to a door with a "Beware of Diva" sign hanging from the handle, behind which an operatic voice vocalizes. The bell rings, and Voigt answers. The visitor reveals itself as a slinky black dress on a black hanger, which speaks with an English-accented male voice. The indignant Voigt humors the supplicant black dress, listening to his pleas for her to give him another chance. Puns pepper the dialogue, with the black dress explaining, "I was young and naïve then! I thought our being together was – a bit of a stretch! [...] I've changed! I'm an altered ma[n] – dress" (Voigt 2008). Voigt does not give in so easily. She goes on to list her accomplishments in the last four years: "Even with all those roles,

I was never trying to be someone that I'm not. I was always myself, with or without you!" Voigt sidles up next to the dress, and romantic music swells as the dress replies, "I know you did, darling – and it only makes appreciate you more! You're a strong woman, and one of the greatest voices of our time! And even if you don't need me, I hope you'll take me back." Voigt then expresses diva-ish glee about what happened in 2004, "we certainly did have them talking in '04. All those headlines! The scandals! The TV cameras! I'm really excited about going back to Covent Garden for Ariadne." She leans over to the dress in the dreamy way one might lean against a lover, and continues: "we've been through this much, I guess we owe ourselves another run." The dress expresses its elation, and Voigt becomes all business again, making it clear that she has the power in this agreement. "Now, get out of here," Voigt orders, "I have to pack." "Yes, madam," the dress acquiesces. The dress floats down the hall and murmurs, "What a dame! What a diva!" The camera cuts to Voigt. "I heard that!" she smirks, and slams the door.

Classically-trained female singers have a love/hate relationship with opera. Even as singers are expected to be thin, attractive, and sure of themselves, they must also be loyal to the repertoire, a virtuosic musician, and capable of conjuring another world when they sing. In other words, opera is a little black dress no singer can comfortably wear. The highly restrictive practices of the Euro-classical pedagogical tradition make it extremely hard for a singer to meet every expectation. Voigt personifies her firing and re-hiring as a male-voiced black dress. The male-voiced dress reminds viewers that opera remains predominantly male-voiced (composers, critics, conductors, producers,

casting directors). Additionally, opera – consequently Euro-classical vocal pedagogy¹ – perpetuate misogynistic and heteronormative expectations of female bodies. The discourses of opera and Euro-classical vocal pedagogy nominate female physical and vocal regulation as acceptable, recordable, and necessary for opera to maintain its integrity as an art form. The female body becomes the site at which the Euro-classical vocal tradition battles for its legitimacy and sustainability.

In this thesis, I thread together queer and musicological discourses on opera, and on training female singers alongside the words and actions of female singers themselves to account for how the idea of “diva performativity” emerges as a regulatory force in the Euro-classical pedagogical tradition. The image of the “opera diva” is a discursive construction which audiences, teachers, and singers evoke to not only justify but glorify the prohibitions enacted on female singing bodies. In my first chapter, I recount the discursive history of “diva,” from the castrato to audio recordings in order to show how and why opera fetishizes the female body and voice. In the second chapter, I identify the heteronormative discourses in popular vocal training manuals, investigating how male and female voices become separate and clearly defined. In my third chapter, I use interviews with Clara Johnson,² Sasha Cooke, and Emily Pulley, who are three female singers in various stages of their careers, to illustrate how the diva image affects a female singer’s subjectivity. In naming “diva” as a multi-faceted performative construction, I ask opera scholars and opera institutions to consider diva behaviors as not natural, but citational. In this introduction, I define pertinent terms, recount diva scholarship, and foreground my critical intervention.

Defining “Diva:” Virtuosity, Vocality, and Performativity

First and foremost, divas are the most accomplished, most virtuosic female opera singers. Judith Hamera defines virtuosity as

a communal organizing fiction. It contains a social story of looking, of engaging corporeal and contextual difference, not through invocations of the essential and the autonomous, but rather through the power of the vicarious and, specifically, through projections onto the screen of the exceptional performer. (Hamera 2007, 41)

Though Hamera is interested in the restrictions placed on dancers in a ballet studio, vocal pedagogy projects the image of the virtuosic singer in a similar way. It is, however, not only the singer’s body that molds to this image, but the voice as well. I am interested in how Euro-classicism enforces virtuosity for female bodies and voices, who decides what is virtuosic, and how Euro-classicism genders virtuosity in political ways.

“Vocality” derives from Roland Barthes’ idea of “the grain of the voice” (1977), and it is a relatively new consideration in music studies. Following a line of phenomenological theorists, Annette Schlichter defines “vocality” as the way people perform their voices within certain cultural constructs. She discusses vocality in terms of gender: “[w]hile within the normative regimes of gender, the voice might appear as thoroughly naturalized, [...] the sound of the voice can be understood as a culturally-framed physical accomplishment rather than as a biologically fixed expression of gender” (Schlichter 2011, 43). Katherine Meizel also presents vocality as a culturally constructed phenomenon, but from a Euro-classical voice performance perspective. She

writes: “I understand *vocality* [her emphasis] as encompassing the act of vocalization and the entirety of that which is being vocalized – it is a set of vocal sounds, practices, techniques, and meanings that factor into the making of culture and the negotiation of identity. Vocality, then, is part and parcel of how we interact with the world around us, of who we think we are” (Meizel 2011, 269). I combine these two definitions to consider “vocality” as gendered, culturally constructed, and inextricable from identity. Thus, voice becomes a performative part of an individual’s gendered identity. In the world of opera, the Euro-classical pedagogical tradition cultivates specific vocal aesthetics so that listening bodies may experience certain affects. There are three primary female vocalities in Euro-classical opera: soprano, mezzo soprano (mezzo), and contralto. These vocalities relate to register and tessitura.³ I deal primarily with the soprano and mezzo voices, as they are the most common voice parts; they are also the female vocalities most prominent in the Euro-classical repertoire. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to soprano voices refer to the mezzo soprano voice as well.⁴

In order to challenge Euro-classical pedagogy’s heteronormativity, I use Judith Butler’s theory of performativity to explain the constructed embodiment of the opera diva through a queer theoretical framework. I expand Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity to explain Euro-classical vocal pedagogy as a performative practice. Butler writes,

Because there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes [...], and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all.

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis. (1990, 190)

There is no concrete narrative of the opera diva. She has no finite beginning nor subsequent evolution. In Euro-classical opera and voice pedagogy, the female body is the inscriptive site of numerous gendered expectations in terms of clothing, stance, gesture, and voice. Furthermore, enforcers of these practices often use the Euro-classical canon as vindication for these gendered prohibitions. In the moment a Euro-classical singer sings, she recalls the history of Euro-classical pedagogy, thus the image of the opera diva. I use the terms “diva-ness,” “divahood,” and “divadom” to evoke the performativity of the Euro-classical opera diva.

Though I locate “diva” at the nexus of virtuosity, vocality, and performativity, I add one element from the etymology of “diva:” divinity. The “diva” associated with Euro-classical opera derives from the Italian word “divino,” meaning divine. Women in opera were not always labeled “diva.” The first term that arose in relation to female opera singers was “prima donna,” which opera houses used to distinguish between the leading lady and other female members of an opera’s cast. (Cowgill and Poriss 2012, xxxii). In the twenty-first century, “diva” and “prima donna” have become interchangeable, especially in opera publications.⁵ Opera scholars Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss contrast the two terms: “whereas both terms embody extremes, ‘prima donna’ carries greater potential for neutrality [...]. It is less highly charged than ‘diva’” (xxxiv). Poriss, a singer herself, discards “diva” in favor of the more “neutral” prima donna, for reasons I will discuss in my final chapter. I, however, postulate that “opera

singer” and “diva” are inseparable. Poriss’ reticence might also come from the fact that “diva” is a queer word; it evokes the world of drag performance, which arguably stems from the excessive operatic tradition. It is the aesthetic effect of the Euro-classical mode of vocal production that contributes to the concept of “divadom.” As Cowgill and Poriss describe, “[d]iva’ is still used in operatic discourse today [...] to refer to someone who is or was not quite human—a magnificent creature able to transcend the mundane and in the process move those who listen to her through flights of rapture” (xxxiii). Sopranos are the highest choral voices, and those most likely to play the lead female characters in opera. Through the repertoire, the Euro-classical tradition fashions the female body and voice as instruments. Sheet music perpetuates these vocalities, with dramatic and sensational pitches, dynamics, texts, and articulation that evoke the diva. Consequently, no soprano can avoid this evocation if she wishes to sing in the Euro-classical tradition. The musical text hails her to be dramatic.

In addition to “diva” evoking queerness, “diva” also refers to virtuosic performers in non-opera music genres. Because there are pop divas, jazz divas, film divas, etc., scholars must differentiate diva meanings. Susan Leonardi and Rebecca Pope (1996), and Susan McClary (1991) float seamlessly from opera to popular music, from *bel canto* opera stars to pop music icons. Their comprehensive definition of “diva” enriches their analyses, but my project concerns training, which varies enough that I cannot consider pop or jazz vocalists. Though opera diva performances were once popular music diva performances, opera vocality and popular music vocality register differently to modern audiences. An audience perceives a vocalist singing in the Euro-

classical style as more of an antiquated diva than the popular music sensation.

Additionally, a diva's "voice" in modern diva performances is discardable; "diva"

legibility happens through the body first, attitude second, and the voice third or never.⁶

The current opera diva is a museum piece, whereas the popular music diva may continue as a symbol of subversive feminist performance.

Context and Intervention

There are four groups of texts that are relevant to my discussion of diva performance. The first body of literature examines the relationship between divas and their audiences. The second discusses diva doings and her representations in film, literature, and opera media. The third documents soprano repertoire, and the fourth, her training. Despite this broad and varied body of literature, however, very little connects the diva's performing body, her character, and her training.

Most discourses on the diva and her audience draw on queer theory. Literary scholar Wayne Koestenbaum (1993) comes closest in connecting diva performances to nineteenth-century constructions of femininity. He grounds his analysis in queer theory and links diva and desire; the opera queen desires to express himself with the simultaneously powerful and vulnerable voice of the opera diva.⁷ Divas communicate erotic desire with a queerly excessive voice, one with which the opera queen will never be able to perform. What Koestenbaum does that others do not is link the diva through her gesture, posture, and public image to nineteenth-century theories of femininity. Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat: (Homo)sexuality and the Mystery of Desire*

theorizes his and the opera diva's queerness as manifest in the sonic moment. His 1991 article "The Queen's Throat: (Homo)sexuality and the Art of Singing," connects the opera diva and the physical sensation of operatic singing. In this article, Koestenbaum suggests that operatic singing is "inseparable from nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourse of the sexual body" (209). More importantly, Koestenbaum recognizes the diva as a transferable way-of-being, but not necessarily a transferable way to perform the voice. The non-singer can imagine a sensation, can yearn for it, but at its crux, diva is not just a bodily mimicry; it is a vocality contingent on the body. For all that is useful about Koestenbaum's intimate extrapolations, he fails to account for queer female desires in relation to the opera diva.⁸ Koestenbaum subsumes queer female desire into queer male desire.

Fortunately, Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A. Pope's *The Diva's Mouth: Body, Voice, and Prima Donna Politics* accounts for a queer female experience of the opera singer. They discuss diva representations in opera, film, recordings, and pop music. Leonardi and Pope use the diva to provide a counter perspective to Catherine Clément's discussion of opera (1988). The "diva," that is the female body performing on stage, saves the masculinist tradition of opera from being pigeonholed as sexist. *Diva's Mouth* focuses on lesbian authors' writings about opera divas in order to provide a counter-narrative to Koestenbaum's that constructs a diva's relationship with her audience as constructive rather than consumptive.

I make my first intervention using Susan McClary's idea that music informs how bodies perform. The soprano repertoire cues diva performance, even demands it, from

the singers who perform it. In her seminal work *Feminine Endings*, McClary makes a five-point feminist intervention into musicology. The first concerns musical constructions of gender and sexuality. She charts the beginning of music's gendered practices;⁹ it follows that because music is a gendered discourse, the repertoire meant for the female voice is always already gendered by virtue of text or anticipated performer. Layered onto this assertion is the hierarchical relationship between performer and composer: female diva (body/voice) and male composer (mind). Thus the Euro-classical singer defines herself in relation to the repertoire, as I discuss in Chapter 2, and performs in order to best realize the repertoire, as I investigate in the rest of this thesis.

Because I connect "diva" and "(mezzo) soprano," I account for the extensive body of literature that theorizes the Euro-classical singer and her repertoire. Again, McClary's controversial monograph was the first musicology text to analyze music by considering the contributions of the performing body, simultaneously offering an explicitly feminist reading of music semiotics and theory. Her feminist intervention situates her contribution between representation and repertoire. A contemporary of McClary, Carolyn Abbate, elaborates the juxtaposition of an opera singer's "plot-character" in the literary narrative and her "voice-character" in the musical narrative in *Unsung Voices* (1991, 10-11). Abbate's terms help tease out aspects of *narrative* which produce "diva" and aspects of *music* which produce "diva." The words and music debate, though lively, is not my concern here.¹⁰ Divas are the bodies bridging word-meaning and music-meaning in Euro-classical vocal performance. I complicate

Koestenbaum, Leonardi and Pope, McClary, and Abbate's presentations of diva agency by placing their claims in conversation with Euro-classical vocal pedagogy.

There are two ways to approach singing technique: through a personal, embodied experience or through a perception of "national technique." Embodied singing technique is an important component of diva discourse because when a singer performs technique, she performs diva. I use voice manuals to supplement to my field research, because "[v]oice manuals staple the singer into the [Euro-classical] family" (Koestenbaum 1991, 225). Though there are many manuals and methods for the voice, I will examine some of the most widely circulated texts that focus on the individual. Using these manuals, I interrogate heteronormative rhetoric which widens the distinctions between biological sex and constructs the female body as inherently unsuited to performing Euro-classical voice. Consequently, female singers require more profound restrictions than male singers in order to best represent the repertoire. The second way to group singing technique uses the idea of "national" vocal techniques. This is less common in the United States than in Europe. Full consideration of nationalized singing schools is beyond the scope of this thesis, though the legitimacy of national styles of singing marks a divide in Euro-classical vocal pedagogy.

Interrogating Power

This research employs a Foucauldian approach to the archive. A Foucauldian approach accounts for multiple bodies connected by a common pedagogical experience. Expanding Nietzsche's rejection of an origin in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887),

Foucault theorizes a genealogy of history that accounts for the relationships among people and things.¹¹ I use his idea of genealogy to ground my exploration of “diva.” Additionally, Foucault presents a useful way to theorize a drawing out of “diva” from the discursive legacy.

Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge*, which I approach through Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, re-theorizes discourse and proposes an approach to unpacking discursive formations. These are “patterned forms of practice” (Cousins and Hussain 1984, 88). Foucault presents four hypotheses for understanding a discursive legacy, all of which fail. This leads him to a method that describes the “system of dispersion” between statements, which marks the “conditions of existence [...] of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance” (Foucault 1972, 38). Diva is first and foremost a Euro-classical practice communicated through teaching texts and bodies. This approach is useful for researching how divas’ roles inform their performance. Divas operate at the intersection of a musical character’s past and their own bodily present. Divas perform in service to a character that words and music constitute. Following Foucault, I account for how power—in addition to and juxtaposed with vocal technique—shapes singers’ performance.

Nina Eidsheim’s Ph.D. dissertation “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Pedagogy” (2008) provides a model for my own methodology. Eidsheim uses ethnographies of voice students, a singing software program, and autoethnography to explore the history of a perceived racial voice. My research expands her conclusion that vocal timbre is performed by,

rather than essential to, the body; however, I consider gendered rather than racial and ethnic vocal performances. Elizabeth Tolbert's Ph. D. dissertation on Karelian laments provides an ethnomusicological methodology for understanding how female voices imbue musical texts with cultural meaning (1988, 92). While Tolbert discusses "femaleness" as it emerged in Karelian history, I consider gender through the "diva" trope in operatic discourse.

Throughout this thesis, I introduce the sections within chapters using the voices of my interlocutors Clara, Sasha, and Emily. I do this in order to write performatively, remembering that theory derives from embodied practice. This project began with my reflecting on my own study as a Euro-classical vocalist. I do not critically regard the Euro-classical tradition in order to paralyze it, nor do I intend to shame female vocalists in this tradition. Rather, I ask singers to question the essentialist notions about performing the voice, and that the disciplining of the voice cannot be separated from the disciplining of bodies. I urge opera audiences, teachers, production companies, and scholars to recognize how aesthetics are always political, and can influence and even damage a student singer's subjectivity. Though I have conflicted feelings about the efficacy of opera in its current state, I recognize the powerful potential of deep thought about sound and vocalizing bodies.

¹ Here I use the preferred term for what scholars have traditionally labeled the "Western classical music tradition." (Cook 2008, 51-53). By "Euro-classical voice pedagogy," I mean the practice of training singers in the European opera tradition. This also includes using the texts written for this operatic voice for vocal pedagogical purposes. I use "Euro-classical" for accuracy.

² "Clara Johnson" is a pseudonym my interlocutor chose. Emily Pulley gave me permission to use her real name, and I only use Sasha Cooke's published and recorded interviews.

³ “Register” refers to how high or low a person can sing, while “tessitura” refers to the most comfortable section of the voice. The difference between register and tessitura can be explained thusly: a mezzo soprano may be able to sing higher than a soprano, but the soprano feels and sounds more comfortable singing in the high part of her voice than the mezzo. By naming these “vocalities” rather than “voice parts,” I suggest that these categories contribute to a singer’s perception of self.

⁴ Combining soprano and mezzo vocalities in my analyses allows me to consider breech roles in the context of divahood. I will concede that historically, soprano voices are the most desirable of the female voices because (male) composers have written more songs for the soprano voice than any other female voice (Clément 2000, 21-2). Mezzo repertoire begins to equal soprano repertoire as twenty-first-century composers write for mezzos.

⁵ Cowgill and Poriss pinpoint the difference between the two terms: “both signify women who perform leading roles in operatic works, and -- one can even push further -- a female singer of high repute and immense popularity,” (2012, xxxii).

⁶ Pop singer Beyoncé might be the 2015 diva paradigm.

⁷ “Opera queen” is a derogatory term for gay male opera enthusiasts (Koestenbaum 1993, 9-45).

⁸ Koestenbaum also has an extensive analysis of “text as male” and “music as female,” which is not a productive, nor credible, distinction (1993, 176-197). I do not consider Koestenbaum’s monograph as fact, but I do regard it as an intimate account of one person’s erotic relationship to opera. Consequently, the eroticism he describes echoes some of my interlocutors’ and my own experiences singing.

⁹ McClary details how seventeenth-century composers developed “a musical semiotics of gender” through opera (1991, 7). She continues by saying “individuals learn how to be gendered beings through their interactions with cultural discourses such as music” (7-8).

¹⁰ For a brief summary of this debate and its influence in the musicological community, see Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, 2012, 2-12.

¹¹ Foucault lays out the criteria of a practical genealogy: “it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history- in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engage in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remain unrealized [...]” (Foucault 2003, 351).

CHAPTER II

DISCOURSE AND THE DIVA: CASTRATI, BREECH ROLES, AND THE POLITICS OF EXCESS

In May 2014, 27-year-old Irish mezzo-soprano Tara Erraught portrayed a physically intractable Octavian in the UK's Glyndebourne Opera's production of Richard Strauss' 1911 *Der Rosenkavalier*. Five male music critics from large London publications suggested that Erraught's physical size and shape were aesthetically dissonant from their preconceived images of Octavian. The critics wrote that, consequently, Erraught's body affected the comprehensibility of the character, and thus the opera as a whole.

Der Rosenkavalier tells the story of the married, middle-aged Marschallin whose young lover Octavian falls in love with Sophie, the teenage fiancée of the Marschallin's cousin. Octavian is a trouser role, which means a woman cross-dresses as a man to play him. According to the Glyndebourne website, the librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal describes the role of Octavian as "for a graceful girl dressed up as a man." Technically, Octavian is not always dressed as a man. He actually goes through several gender performances in the opera: he cross-dresses as the chambermaid Mariandel to avert discovery in the Marschallin's bedchamber, he reassumes his male garb as the Rose Cavalier to present the traditional silver engagement rose to Sophie, and he re-dons maid's clothing in the third act before he finally returns to his doublet and hose. Octavian is both a marvelous singing role for a mezzo soprano, and a challenging acting

role. For opera buffs, Octavian embodies the deliciously complex queer eroticism opera can offer.¹

Glydebourne's production impressed the five male critics, with their only complaints focused on Erraught's body. Andrew Clark of the *Financial Times* described her Octavian as "a chubby bundle of puppy-fat, better suited to play Mariandel in Acts 1 and 3 than the romantic rose-cavalier of Act 2 – albeit gloriously sung" (2014). *The Telegraph*'s Rupert Christiansen echoes Clark's two-faced sentiment: "There is no doubt of the talent of this young Irish mezzo, based in Germany, who sings with vibrant assurance and proves herself a spirited comedian. But she is dumpy of stature and [...] her costuming makes her resemble something between Heidi and Just William" (2014). Some blamed the costuming, some the casting, and some just blamed Erraught. Within a few days, (mostly female) critics flew in to defend Erraught's performance, and called out the London reviewers as sexist (Cooper et al. 2014; Midgette 2014; Tsioulcas 2014).

"Tara-gate"² showcases two aspects of a pertinent paradox for women in opera. First, the five London critics expected Erraught to seamlessly shift between male and female embodiments. They felt that she looked fine when she was playing Octavian dressed as Miriandel, but not Octavian dressed as Octavian. Second, Erraught's perceived inability to shift between these embodiments compromised the comprehensibility of the opera. In this chapter, I detail how opera singers came to be deified as always already excessive performing bodies, fetishized as the actual embodiment of opera. I mean "fetish" as both sexual and commoditized. Due to popular perceptions of opera singers, female singers must always position themselves in relation

to an idea of deviance. First, I provide a selective history of the “high voice” in opera. Second, I contextualize the opera singer within the cultural history of opera. Third, I present and analyze discourses on weight and divahood. Finally, I elaborate on how recording and film technology influence audience’s perceptions of the opera diva.

In the Shadow of the Castrati: Women’s Emergence in Opera

“I would struggle with [playing a pants role] unless there’s some flamboyance. And I know that’s bad of me to say [...] I do better with flamboyant male characters ‘cuz I think they feel more like... portraying a woman to me” (Clara, 5 August 2014).

In their book on opera divas, Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A. Pope detail the intimate connection women in opera have to the castrato. Leonardi and Pope argue that castrati “were the first operatic divinities” (1996, 24), spectacularized for their androgynous bodies and voices. Opera historians mythologize the birth of the castrato, identifying only that the practice of castrating boys began in some small Italian city sometime around opera’s genesis (25).³ The Catholic church at this time also employed castrati due to Pope Paul IV’s (1555-1559) official ban on women singing, first in St. Peter’s, and then in all churches. At first, young boys could cover the alto and soprano parts, but as composers wrote more polyphonic music, choirs needed more powerful voices to carry the increased number of voice parts. The Church, not fully permitting nor prohibiting the use of castrati, still would not allow women onstage. Leonardi and Pope conclude that consequently, “the Church created the market for castrati even as it officially condemned the practice of castration” (26).

While the Church propagated the creation and training of castrati, these singers found the most lucrative employment in the new art form of opera. Castrati sang both male hero roles and travesti roles in which they portrayed women.⁴ Opera audiences experienced the castrati as a fetish, which helped to spectacularize opera. Part of opera's allure included witnessing the castrati's bodily and vocal gender indefinability. As certain castrati's celebrity grew, so did stories about their erratic emotional behavior, voracious appetites, and sexual promiscuity. Leonardi and Pope explain how this relates to the opera diva:

[T]he satire and abuse heaped on castrati [...] precedes and parallels the accusations later made against divas [...]. Such prima donna stereotypes as vanity, luxury, temper, unreasonableness, competitiveness, and licentiousness were common accusations against castrati, and the castrati who lived up to these stereotypes are, of course, generally better remembered than their less excessive brethren. (27)

In a sense, castrati were the first opera divas, and they continued to dominate opera during the first half of the eighteenth century. Female vocalists were beginning to sing publicly by this point, but audiences thought women's voices did not signify in the same exotic way castrato voices did (40). Women also did not have the same opportunities for training as castrati, and were thus considered inferior singers (41). Castrati came to symbolize opera's bodily, vocal, and temperamental excesses.

In the latter half of the century, women began to assume the opera roles previously sung by castrati. Leonardi and Pope surmise that "the increasing rejection of

aristocratic tyranny and the championing of individual liberties – tended to cast castrati as an embarrassing sign of aristocratic excess and decadence” (42).⁵ Female singers became the “next best thing” as the practice of castrating young boys petered out at the turn of the nineteenth century. Naomi André elaborates on female vocalists’ sonic connection to castrati in *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Opera* (2006). She documents the changing vocal aesthetic with regards to character during the nineteenth-century.

Throughout the eighteenth century, women and castrati had been singing heroic roles interchangeably; when the first choice of the castrato had not been available, a female singer would be substituted. As women’s voices continued to portray female characters, the popularity for their voices in heroic travesti roles *was fueled by the nostalgia for the castrato voice* [emphasis added]. The preference for flexible treble timbres in heroic roles increased the demand for women’s voices in opera. Hence, at the beginning of the nineteenth century women’s voices ended up being the sound par excellence for both the hero and the heroine. (89)

Female singers’ ability to learn castrato singing techniques and thus sing in the high register of their voices allowed the nineteenth century to become “the age of the diva” (Leonardi and Pope 42). Breech roles became palimpsests, with female bodies standing in for castrato bodies because only female voices could substitute for castrato voices. In this way, female bodies and voices became the new spectacularized element of opera.

The allure of women *en travesti* was twofold. First, spectators witnessed illicit love: frequently two women, one playing a woman and the other playing a man, wooed each other on stage. Secondly, the audience could see a female body in knickers and tights virtually exposed: a tantalizing sight for eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century audiences. Kirsten Pullen explains how women performing in male clothing were both illicit and erotic. In her chapter on nineteenth-century cultural and theatrical performance, Pullen writes, “the cross-dressed actress did not reinforce gender convention, but rather illuminated the history of that conventionality” (2005, 111). She goes on to explain the multi-level significations of a female body in male dress, which included dominance in sexual relationships, lesbianism, sexual promiscuity, and general claims to male privilege (98; 120). Two treble voices intertwining may also signify specific erotics. Suzanne Cusick describes lesbian eroticism using the Indigo Girls. She writes, “they perform themselves as ‘girls’ [...] whose voices (bodies) ‘fit together perfectly’ and ‘sound spectacular’ in unexpected, identity-blurring, erotically charged ways” (1999, 37). Thus, a twofold queer eroticism emerged from female singers replacing castrati. Women’s emergence on the opera stage highlights the legacy of spectacularization inherent in opera. As the castrato body and voice became extinct, the need for exoticism fell to the female-bodied, treble-voiced performers.

Power and the Erotics of the Diva Voice

EMILY. And some people, they would rather have [un-intimate opera]⁶ because it allows them to remain in control.

HANNAH. Like- what d'you mean control? Like, of themselves? Of the-?

EMILY. Of everything! [...] I mean, (glottal stop) you allow what comes

in...y'know...and you can pretend you've had this 'Oh! Gosh!' experience,

it's...mutual masturbation. IT REALLY IS. [...] there's noooo-

(overlapping)

HANNAH. -that there's no dialogue

EMILY. no exchange of fluids

(laughs and sputtering)

EMILY. But really, to beat the metaphor into the ground, how are you creating

anything? If there's no actual- seriously. (31 May 2014)

As I detailed in the previous section, the voice and body in opera are inextricable.

Socio-music theorists John Shepherd and Peter Wicke compellingly describe the inextricability: “To hear a voice, a musical sound, is to ‘have knowledge’ of the corporeal and somatic state which produced it. The reaction is both sympathetic and empathetic” (1997, 180). In celebrations of the diva, her agency is a frequent topic of analysis. Most often, scholars locate a diva’s power in her voice’s virtuosity and somatic effects. She exists in a middle space of not-woman but not not- woman.⁷ As

Koestenbaum conjectures, “The diva is demonized: she is associated with difference itself, with a satanic separation from the whole, the clean, the contained, and the attractive. [...] The diva overturns the world’s gendered ground by making femaleness seem at once powerful and artificial” (1993, 104). Because the diva in this reading is by definition monstrous, she cannot help but transgress space and aesthetic sensibilities. She

transgresses through her rendering femaleness both powerful and artificial: constructed, but still efficacious. In this section, I consider the eroticized diva voice as a vocality.

Emily Pulley is not singular in using sexual metaphors to describe the relationship between audience and opera singer. Koestenbaum literally approaches the diva from the inside (of her anatomy). He begins his investigation by detailing how scholars and vocal theorists have come to code the voice as feminine because of two aspects: first, the vocal cords are hidden from view, and second, the vocal cords themselves are labial (Koestenbaum 1991, 211-2). Koestenbaum, however, presents another reading of the vocal cords. As he suggests, “[t]hough the voice culturist may zealously equate voice and vagina, it is possible that voice may be, in fact, a symbol of a separate pleasure zone that offers Edenic, imaginary alternatives to dominant cultural models of what sex means” (214). Koestenbaum theorizes the voice as a third, androgynous pleasure zone, as nongenital –able to both penetrate and engulf. Here, he imagines a third use to the voice, thus a queering of the relationship between body and voice, both from the point of view of the singer and the listener. He mentions previously: “Operatic singing doesn’t represent any single sexual or gendered configuration, but is a metaphor for how our bodies stumble into sex and gender in the first place” (206). Here he evokes an idea of excess. To be relegated to one gendered voice writ narrow (the speaking voice) is seldom how a person encounters ideas about gender and sexuality. Rather, these ideas come at a person from all sides, flooding them, flowing between their conscious and subconscious minds. The operatic voice allows for dynamism, reaching the summit of a human voice’s capabilities and its depths. In this way, Koestenbaum

complicates the pre-1990 dominant discourse of voice-as-feminine. However, he slices open the female body to accomplish his critique, as though he assumes voice is innate.

Vocality, as defined in the introduction to this thesis, is the way a person performs her voice. It is the accents, the schwas, the cadences of a phrase. It is a person's vocal identity; this is voice-as-performance. Especially in the world of opera, the Euro-classical pedagogical tradition cultivates specific vocal aesthetics in the knowledge that performances of said aesthetics achieve certain affective ends for listening bodies. The diva voice is the virtuosic voice. It is a voice so compelling that listeners cannot turn away. Koestenbaum's is the most frequently cited text on his somatic relationship to opera divas. He reiterates the deity that is the female opera voice, and rejoices that he does not know the secrets of producing a diva vocality: "I tried to learn [to sing], and have failed, and am secretly glad to have failed, for if I'd succeeded in demystifying voice, I would have no god left" (1993; 155). Koestenbaum frequently fixates on his inability, specifically as a male, to produce a diva's voice. For Koestenbaum, to know the means of production is to destroy the perceived sanctity of the operatic singing voice. Therefore, a diva only retains her power when she is finished and whole – a complete product.

Three Fetishizing Shifts: Connecting Opera and Vocal Pedagogy

Two innovations in the nineteenth century shifted the connections between pedagogical methods of vocal production and the female body/voice. First, the nineteenth century ushered in a plethora of medical technology meant to study the voice.

Voice teachers, opera singers, and opera enthusiasts touted the superiority of the scientific method in understanding the seductive power of this hidden instrument.

Koestenbaum links the scientific study of the voice to the scientific study of femininity and sexuality.⁸ Such discourses emerged in the nineteenth century in order to discipline excessive and deviant bodies. McClary elaborates on musical dimensions of the disciplining practice:

[T]he “meaning” of femininity was not the same in the eighteenth century as in the late nineteenth, and musical characterizations differ accordingly. To be sure, many aspects of the codes are strikingly resilient and have been transmitted in ways that are quite recognizable up to the present....”
(McClary 1991, 8)

In other words, there are musical codes which evoke performances of nineteenth-century femininity; these codes continue to be read as “feminine” in the twenty-first century. Opera singers’ performances of this repertoire reiterate these particular vocal representations of femininity.

Second, the nineteenth-century brought about the opera house: gargantuan theatres across Europe and the United States meant specifically to house opera performances. Consequently, opera became more theatrically and musically elaborate. Before this, operas happened in small parlors, and only the very wealthy could attend. Consequentially, women’s voices were smaller and tutors spent their energies encouraging vocal flexibility to lavishly embellish songs and arias. Though most opera houses, save the most historically significant, are no longer in use, the repertoire written

for these spaces is. The most frequently performed repertoires are by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century composers; these operas have powerhouse female characters, written to perform an opera-house-filling sound.⁹ In the Euro-classical tradition, singers train to have big voices and big presences, as the trope that opera singers can break glass illustrates. In order to sing in prestigious opera houses, a vocalist must be able to project through the space without artificial amplification.¹⁰ The birth of scientific modes of voice research and the opera house influenced the way voice instructors, opera directors, and voice manuals instructed singers. These innovations changed the discourses about the voice, pedagogy, and the “right” way for a female body to produce virtuosic sound. Diva can have a negative connotation in opera: as a singer who is both fabulous and horrible. Consequently, the opera diva becomes always already excessive.

Lastly, a shift occurred in opera culture at the turn of the 20th century in the United States. In the mid-nineteenth-century, American opera was a shared culture. Singers performed operas transcribed into English,¹¹ and frequently interspersed popular ballads with opera arias (Levine 1988, 90). This fluidity between “popular” and “elite” culture diminished as print media touted “Opera” as the pinnacle of artistic representation, and as “opera was performed in isolation from other forms of entertainment to an audience that was far more homogenous than those who had gathered earlier” (101). Opera, especially foreign-language opera, became the purview of the elite, supported by a small group of wealthy patrons. Levine marks the shift by citing New York Times’ critic W. J. Henderson’s 1900 reaction to a Metropolitan Opera evening consisting of four acts from four separate operas. Levine writes,

He [Henderson] was still more critical of management for it had thrown away “all semblance of art in the opera house” and had put together a “hotch-potch continuous performance of extracts from operas” in order to “draw more money than the best vaudeville entertainment in the city,” and had deliberately lured these ignorant people there by offering them “a program of broken candy.” Opera, Henderson was insisting, was too important, too exalted an art form to present itself to an uninformed, eclectic audience, many of whom cared more for the performers than the art being performed. To present excerpts rather than entire operas was to demean the very integrity of opera as an art form. (103)

Levine explains that Henderson was not an anomaly; rather, he “symbolized a transition that, in Ronald Davis’s terms, saw opera becoming ‘more a *symbol* of culture than a real cultural force,’ and the opera house becoming less a center of entertainment than a sacred source of cultural enlightenment” (104).

Through these three shifts in the nineteenth-century: scientific and medical examination of the singing voice, huge opera houses, and opera symbolizing “high culture,” women who sing opera became objects of scrutiny and study. Singers became deities as the institution of opera literally and figuratively distanced singers and repertoire from audiences. Following from the spectacular castrato, discursive eroticizing of the opera vocality, and opera’s cultural shifts, the female singer became opera’s most successful fetish.

Fatness, Weight Loss, and the Diva Body

I have been on a diet since I was 8 years old. I was called chubby in school and have lost 90 pounds since college. In hindsight, what made me feel so great singing was that it wasn't about looks. I could thrive and be celebrated. But the world has changed. I am constantly on a diet. (Cooke, 31 January 2014)

Narratives of excess most often concern female singers' weight and temperament. Commenters (teachers, critics, opera goers, even scholars) feel justified in their scrutiny because they are ultimately interested in the voice. Their logic follows from organology, or the study of musical instruments. For example, a violin sounds differently than a cello in terms of register and timbre. It would follow, then, that larger bodies sound differently than smaller bodies. Consequently, fatness and weight loss are not only aesthetic concerns, but vocal concerns as well.

There is a legacy of opera divas being larger women, with questionable evidence that larger bodies produce larger sounds. I turn to Maria Callas as the example of a dramatic mid-career weight loss. Of the many writers who mythologize Callas' weight loss, Stelios Galatopoulos' account is the most descriptive. He narrates:

[S]he succeeded in reducing her weight permanently from 100 to 60 kilos [220 to 130 pounds]. This dramatic weight loss, which she accomplished without withdrawing from her numerous stage performances and amazingly without any side effects (her skin remained smooth and taut), created a furore [sic]. For a long time the international press gave its own incredible versions about Callas's mysterious transformation. These

stretched from starvation to ingesting a tapeworm and employing other secret therapies that amounted to sorcery. (1998, 133-4)

Galatopoulos' account of the buzz around Callas weight loss exposes the superhuman expectations of opera singers. Other sources document Callas' weight loss as a "mysterious transformation" and akin to "sorcery" (Crico 2000, 17-22; Allegri 1997, 36-41). Opera literature has so effectively constructed Callas as "diva" that even her weight loss becomes spectacular and super human.

Wayne Koestenbaum expounds on fatness and the diva:

"Fat," in diva iconography, means "presence." I love the voice but I am not supposed to pay attention to the body behind it, a body with questionable, shifting boundaries, a body able to absorb mine through vocal osmosis, a body with an open mouth emitting spit, a mouth that might swallow me as the whale swallowed Jonah. (1993, 102)

This fear and wonder at being swallowed, eaten, points in a monstrous way to diva's divinity. A huge voice either magnifies a huge body, or contrasts with a small one. For example, Waltraud Meier, a well-reviewed Wagnerian soprano, is svelte by opera standards. The dichotomy of her small body with her large voice sparks discussions of wonder and skepticism within opera culture. In the twenty-first century, the diva body is no longer as deviant as it was even in the 1990s. Peter Brooks describes the opposite relationship to excess in opera. He writes:

Those who dislike opera do so precisely because they prefer singing voices to be disembodied, pure voice; they cannot accept a convention

that, as we know, can lead to [...] a voluminous soprano made to represent a teenage virgin. The demands made on voice and body for dramatic representation are not the same, and the claim for their coincidence will very often demand a large dose of faith on the part of the spectator/listener, a willingness to accept an as-if that would seem to be excluded from a genre that traditionally seeks, in its stage settings and effects, such a large measure of illusionism. [...Lovers of opera] revel in the weird excess of the situation. (2000, 121)

This was written merely fifteen years ago. Large opera houses in the United States no longer celebrate this excess of body in relation to character. The standard opera body creeps towards the social norm and reifies popular perceptions of beauty.

In the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, opera singers were celebrities, subject to the same scrutiny as contemporary film stars, which consequently often made them subjects of gossip. A particular temperament was assumed to accompany that celebrity, and specific presumed behaviors were often taken for authentic personality. Indeed, the most common twenty-first century use of “diva” is to call someone temperamental. The “diva temperament” can include unprovoked displays of rage, strange neuroses, fights with other singers, seemingly senseless demands, and general assertions of superiority. Perhaps this is the diva temperament: simply believing in one’s own potential for divaness.

Diva biographies often spin tall tales about female singers’ fits of insanity and hysteria, usually around narratives of vocal crisis brought on by roles. This instance of

excess is the most poetically used in literary scholarship. Koestenbaum interprets: “Certain post-*bel canto* operas are famed for ruining voices. It’s plausible that voice-wrecking parts show the character to be in psychosexual crisis, and unsettle the distinction between the diva and her role; singing the part of a martyred, hysterical woman destroys, in turn, the diva’s voice” (1993, 127). He goes on to cite an anecdote by famed voice teacher Blanche Marchesi (1863-1940) about a voice doctor going to Richard Strauss (a post-*bel canto* composer) and saying, “I have advised...all my lady singer clients, to stop singing your music until it shall be written for the human voice” (127). Freudian jargon aside, Koestenbaum identifies a common trope in diva narratives: the role that destroyed the diva’s voice. I will discuss rhetorics of danger in the subsequent chapter on vocal training, but it is worth noting now that hysteria bridges the categories of body, voice, and temperament. In this instance, the desires of the voice are its undoing, which break the body. I now explain how opera writers construct a singer’s excess through character.

Salome, a Case Study: The Singers Become their Characters

The topic of character draws the most contradiction in diva scholarship, with discussions about character devolving into two camps: character-as-diva and diva-as-character(s). In musicological discourse, the character and the diva are synonymous: the character is the diva. There are such things as “diva roles,” which are operatic leading roles that display a singer’s expert musicianship and vocal technique. Literary and musicological scholars will use a famous soprano as an example of a certain role, but

ultimately the musical character in the abstract dominates, as is the case with Susan McClary. Queer theorists, opera enthusiasts, biographers, and performance historians are interested in the diva-as-character(s), or a diva as defined by the roles she plays or played. To some degree, this linking of character and diva is not too different from the musicologist's view. The difference lies only in the object of study: the text or the person performing the text. To illustrate this phenomenon of character subsuming singer, I turn to the title diva role in another Strauss opera: *Salome* (1905).

Richard Strauss became inspired to write *Salome* after seeing a German translation of Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* (1891). Wilde's play, and the opera, is based on the (Biblical) story of Salome, stepdaughter of Herod Antipas. After dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils, she stands naked before Herod, who promises her anything she desires. Salome asks for the head of John the Baptist (Jochanaan in the opera) served to her on a silver platter. She is culturally understood as a symbol of dangerous female seductiveness. Salome is a special challenge for opera singers because she is considered a dramatic soprano role (akin to a Wagnerian soprano), but she must dance the Dance of the Seven Veils. Herein lies the paradox: the voice part requires a fat soprano, but she also must appear naked at the end of her dance.

Ethan Mordden's *Demented: The World of the Opera Diva* sketches the musicological and biographical side of the diva-character issue. He recounts what he views as the treacherous path a singer must tread when performing these diva roles. He says of the eponymous Salome in Richard Strauss' opera

The character is that of a teenaged girl, spoiled and trivial, sensual but virginal. Her extravagant Art Nouveau flirtation with John the Baptist and subsequent kissing of his severed head is not meant as hysterically self-dramatizing depravity, but as coolly self-important selfishness [...] She operates outside of morality, simply takes what she wants. But the public often wants a lascivious psychopath, and the singer who attempts a less flamboyant and more appropriate Salome runs some risk. Helga Pilarczyk was booed at Covent Garden for a stunning, authentic Salome [...] At the same house Inge Borkh covered a shrill and woolly reading with a portrayal that might have been coached by Caligula. (1984, 124-5)

Mordden begins with a musicological or literary analysis of the character Salome. I mean his analysis is either musicological or literary because his assumptions about Salome's character could have come either from his interpretation of her vocal line in the opera score or from the literary character Salome in Oscar Wilde's play on which the Strauss opera is based. Mordden has his own ideas about what constitutes an "authentic Salome." Though he shows the erratic tastes of the opera enthusiast, he also illustrates the two ways divas dialogue with a character: being absorbed by the character, or absorbing the character.

Susan McClary briefly analyzes the music of Strauss' Salome, the opera's titular character in her chapter on excess and madness in *Feminine Endings*. She begins her chapter by giving brief summaries of Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* and Klaus Doerner's *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie*. She takes from Foucault the framing of

madness as spectacle and from Doerner the need of the modern state to exhibit those who were deviant, “largely as a means of persuading the public to embrace restrictive legal and behavioral codes – codes ostensibly designed to protect individuals from their own potentially fatal excesses” (McClary 1991, 83). She then layers Elaine Showalter’s *The Female Malady* atop these previous theorists to detail how madness was perceived as feminine (84). What becomes excessive for McClary is the music the diva sings in her mad moments onstage. It is musical madness meant to showcase a diva’s technical musicianship. In what follows, I place McClary’s musicological analysis in dialogue with a female singer’s embodiment of Salome.

A vein of diva scholarship that sparked lively debate concerns the relationship of diva to character. It begins with Catherine Clément’s *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (1988). Here begins a feminist critique of music, which Clément undertakes from a narrative perspective. Clément details the sacrificial element to opera’s most popular women:

Women like me from an earlier time, come. Come in procession, so your death at least will be triumphant. In dirty rags, in court robes, half-dressed, in an empress’s rags, dressed like a geisha for innocent colonists, you drag yourselves around when you are consumptive, you dance when you have been stabbed or suffocated under shields, you die strangled by hands that are black,¹² you succumb to a princely kiss, you throw yourself from the top of a Roman palace, you jump into the fire. You cry, you laugh, you trill, you call out so far your voice cannot help but fail you....

You are faced with the spectacle awaiting, in that black hole full of eyes
shining with joy. (11)

In this passage, Clément details the many fates that befall the narrative characters in opera: Madame Butterfly stabs herself, Salome dances to her death, Desdemona is strangled by Othello (Clément does not elaborate on nor interrogate the “black hands”), and Tosca defenestrates herself. In part, this is what many scholars find compelling about the opera diva: her resilience in the moment of infinity. She stares in the face of death, yet mysteriously, sings her heart out. This character narrative carries over into narratives of divas’ lives, as I detail below.

Responding to Clément, Carolyn Abbate offers a musicological, rather than literary intervention. Speaking about the difference of her approach in her seminal work *Unsung Voices* (1991), she says:

Because it exists as a living sonority, music is animated by voices, and these voices do not evaporate when music confronts the insights of contemporary literary criticism, or philosophy of language [...] My claim that *voice* cannot be suppressed in speculation on literary texts has important consequences for thinking about the links between narrative and music. (14)

In other words, Abbate conjectures that the actual singer performing on stage subverts whatever the narrative character in the opera does. A diva’s sonic presence trumps her withering character every time. She names these contrasting opera elements plot-character and voice-character. Abbate’s analysis brings to light a possible explanation

for why this excess exists in opera. The opera diva, via the voice-character written for her by a composer, is already poised to overwhelm her plot-character. Her plot-character is what scholars who study opera from a literary perspective use for analysis, which explains the common threads in literary scholars' perceptions of divaness as excess.

Maria Ewing's portrayal of Salome in the 1992 Royal Opera House production is a prime example of madness both visually and musically. In the final scene, she sings to the severed head of Jochanaan (John the Baptist), emitting piercing high notes amid her *Sprechstimme*, or speak-singing (Strauss 1992). She then launches into lyrical chromaticism that switches between her vocal registers, making the top notes sound in full soprano glory and the bottom notes sound in gravelly chest voice.¹³ While Ewing masterfully performs madness in her face and body, the written musical line by Strauss aids her in her performance. Her body sways with chromatic bends and her hands fly out and up for high declarations. In this way, Ewing channels the "madness" (or accepted signs of madness) and magnifies it. Mad scenes bring diva performance to the fore, as they test a singer's virtuosity. Following from this discussion of Salome, displaying female madness in opera has overt sexual implications. The opera diva wanders onto the stage, perhaps blood drips from her hands. Often she is in her nightclothes, or an undone wedding dress, or in more risqué productions, she is bare-breasted (in traditional "high art" opera, even cocktail dresses are considered scandalous because of the ways they highlight contemporary codes of female sexuality). Journalists sometimes use dress as a means to describe the body, and to ultimately connect character and singer. In an

interview for the Los Angeles Times, Donna Perlmutter works in Maria Ewing's Salome character (and later her portrayal of Carmen). Perlmutter narrates,

A picture of cool serenity, Ewing might be mistaken for an haute-couture runway model. A chic black jumpsuit emphasizes her slenderness. A small pale face, framed by dark hair drawn back, comes to life in the wide doe eyes and fashionably full sensual mouth. Like the Judean princess she portrays in 'Salome,' the Music Center Opera revival that opens Tuesday, the singer stands poised midway between wariness and self-possession.

(1989)

This interview happened before Ewing's Royal Opera *Salome*, and the Salome reference is obviously a creative way to launch into the details about the upcoming performance. That being said, Perlmutter's description of Ewing and her "fashionably full sensual mouth" is meant to tantalize and intrigue. She is adding a dash of "Salome" to Ewing, perhaps in an attempt to heighten Ewing's efficacy as a performer through the lens of authenticity. In other words, Ewing's body, regardless of voice, is the perfect vessel for the Salome character.¹⁴ In this way, Ewing's person morphs with Salome's musical character.

Mary Ann Smart's main subject of inquiry in "The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz," is diva biography, specifically how the absence of a dead singer's voice leads biographers to fill the void of a "singer's essence" with musings (1995, 170). Borrowing from Catherine Clément's monograph, Smart conjectures that biographers often contain the diva by "subsum[ing] their biographies into the roles they play" (171). In Smart's

analysis, biographers “contain” a singer by conflating her personal life and legacy with the types of characters she played onstage. Frequently, a diva is only truly a diva if she transcends a character or becomes synonymous with a character in the operatic repertoire. Often, the contrast of music with narrative character registers as excess.

The Diva and Sound Recording

We’re becoming more and more tolerant of less and less pretty voices...or less full voices in sacrificing to have skinny singers. And I think there’s also the fact that most recordings are just over-produced to within an inch of their life, that they’re so perfect, that we’re looking for an almost...an over-processed sound. (Pulley, 31 May 2014)

The advent of audio-recording technology and the perpetuation of diva imagery go hand in hand. Early audio producers sought out opera singers for their earliest recordings in order to give this new medium, which many considered tawdry entertainment, credibility and class (Koestenbaum 1993, 51; Wilson 2012, 331). Audio-recordings contributed to divas’ perceived excess in two ways. First, records disseminated her voice to more people than could fit in or afford tickets to an opera house, which increased certain divas’ admirers, and thus their careers. This aspect, while important, is not my main point of analysis. My objective lies with the second consequence of the audio-recorded voice. This new technology metaphorically severed her voice from her body, which created unrealistic expectations of ethereality and purity for divas’ voices and also a greater potential for the opera devotee to identify the opera singer’s voice with the self.

Alexandra Wilson's "Galli-Curci Comes to Town: The Prima Donna's Presence in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" analyzes Amelita Galli-Curci's 1924 London visit in order to discuss how the recording industry (namely the gramophone record) began transforming singers' careers, audience relationships, and cultural legacies. She writes, "Gramophone records began to raise listeners' expectations of what they could look forward to hearing in the opera house or concert hall," and Galli-Curci was one of the first opera singers to fall victim to these heightened standards (332). Wilson goes on to explain how these standards may have come to be by describing her own experience listening to Nimbus Records' *Galli-Curci* (1990).

Listening to Galli-Curci's records, one appreciates why critics and audiences heard her as a vocal 'acrobat.' On disc, she performs the most taxing runs and arpeggios with apparent ease: her recorded voice in strikingly even and smooth in tone, irrespective of the agility demanded of her. Indeed, her voice resembles the flute that often accompanies her, to the extent that it almost ceases to sound 'human' at times: it is easy to understand why audiences perceived her voice to be 'perfect' and why the same effects might have been difficult to recreate live (337).

Wilson marks an important point about opera recordings, which is that they allow singers to rest in between sessions. In a concert setting or an opera, breaks are dictated by the written music and there are no second chances; such is the nature of live performance. In the recording process, Galli-Curci would have been likely to request rests and perform arias until they were "perfect." The juxtaposition between Galli-Curci's

recordings and live performance in Wilson's analysis hinges on the audience's perception that they were duped. Galli-Curci deceived them by not having a voice as perfect as the one in recordings London fans had come to know and love. For Wilson, Galli-Curci's voice in the recording sounds like the inanimate, pure-tone flute that accompanies her.¹⁵ For a voice to sound "perfect" in this context, it must be stripped of all that makes it timbrally human.

Wayne Koestenbaum expounds on this relationship with the opera diva recording, nominating audio-recording as the nexus of the fan-diva relationship. He describes his interpretation of the part in Jean-Jacques Beineix's 1981 film *Diva* where the opera fan, Jules, records and then plays back his diva singing Alfredo Catalani's "Ebben? Ne andrò lontana." Koestenbaum explains:

Because Jules causes the tape's music to resound in the empty theater, it appears that the voice singing Catalani's aria is the fan's, not the diva's – as if Jules has truly appropriated her sound. A voice is like a dress; playing a record is sonic drag. I'm not the voice's source, but I absorb the voice through my ears, and because I play the record – an act of will – it seems I am masquerading as that voice (1993, 49).

Koestenbaum's interpretation of an opera fan's listening experience is slightly different from Wilson's; whereas Wilson's description of pleasure-in-listening derives from a seemingly mechanical perfection, Koestenbaum's is in messily soaking up the projected, liquid voice and claiming it as his own. Through owning the recorded diva voice, Koestenbaum finds a unique identity projection. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino

further explains Koestenbaum's sentiment: "[M]any people identif[y] themselves through musical style – sounds heard outside that represented how they felt and who they felt they were inside. [...] Controlling the sonic space [is] literally one way to project oneself throughout the house" (2008, 93). For Koestenbaum, the diva's voice is a sonic representation of his own gay identity. He describes it as manifesting hidden desires, potential breaking points, and beautiful struggle. Part of the allure of the audio-recording is that the listener can become the diva, in a sense. In the privacy of a home, or in the intimacy of a headphoned device, the opera fan mouths the words of the aria and imagines expressing himself with the disembodied voice of the opera diva. Because her voice is untethered to a body, it has queering potential, either in conjunction with an object (flute) or a gay male body. Regardless, her voice becomes transplantable, that is, separable from the body which produces the sound.

Returning to Mary Ann Smart's case study of Rosine Stoltz, fans fashion meaning using the opera diva's voice. Responding to Koestenbaum's interpretation above, Smart adds, "Koestenbaum's construction of the diva's voice as a separable entity, available for the fan's multiplicitous pleasures, enfranchises fandom, granting it license to 'read' opera in exhilaratingly personal terms" (1995, 182). She continues by quoting Heather Hadlock's "Peering into the *Queen's Throat*" (1993) to offer that this enfranchisement of the fandom disenfranchises the singer because it separates her voice from her body. I agree with Smart that the body is integral in performance, but I understand how and why the diva voice becomes the pinnacle of divine expression. Recording technology made the separation of body and voice possible and disseminated

that voice to anyone willing and able to buy the hardware to make it sound. Eventually, though, technology would emerge to transmit the visual aspect of opera and operatic bodies to a wider audience. In a complex way, the diva gets her body back.

The opera is most accessible in the twenty-first century through the Metropolitan Opera Live Broadcasts. Few opera buffs have the time or money to trek to the nearest opera house (which are few and far between) to see an opera, and the closeness, convenience, and cost of these broadcasted performances are better than the “real” thing. Major opera houses make DVDs of their biggest performances, and the curious opera novice can browse YouTube for full operas uploaded legally and illegally. Operas have left the opera houses in a sense, which leaves purists bemoaning the death of “true” opera and the visceral experience of live performance.

Conclusion

EMILY. Y’know, the crap that went on at Glyndebourne...God bless her, the girl was, she was costumed and wigged hideously. She looked awful. She’dve looked awful if she was playing a girl. [...] So y’know, it’s- the fault is on both sides. Don’t make her look bad. Don’t tempt fate, but at the same time, y’know, don’t tell people that they’re ridiculous for hiring somebody that doesn’t look, who’s not six feet tall and skinny

HANNAH. Right- in a different [role]-

EMILY. She could've been fine! If she had been costumed differently- they might have still raked her across the coals because they're bitter, hateful critics. What're you gonna do? (31 May 2014)

Female bodies and voices are always already fetishized in opera. The brief discursive legacy of “diva” I provide attends to the micro-discourses – the moments of rupture in constructing operatic womanhood. Leonardi, Pope, and Andre locate castrati as the beginning of “diva.” Through this and other turn of the nineteenth century cultural shifts in opera, women easily slip into the gender-excessive position the castrati once held. This position allows audiences to scrutinize female singers, because supposedly weight and temperament affect the singing voice. Especially after the turn of the twentieth-century, divas become the ambassadors of new technologies, using their prestige to bolster fledgling media.

Erraught sung at Glyndebourne within the operatic diva legacy. Every time a female bodied person sings operatic music, she writes again on the diva palimpsest. As is often the case, past voices become stronger than her voice. It is almost as if her voice was not enough to justify her body being there – onstage. Women who become history’s “divas” speak loudly, and most of the others slip into the interstices between characters. As Emily says, “What’re you gonna do?”

¹ *Der Rosenkavalier* is also singular in that treble voices have the most music, thus female bodies have the most stage time in the opera.

² “Tara-gate” is the moniker opera journalists assigned to the media flurry surrounding Erraught’s opening night performance as Octavian.

³ Historians consider “the first opera” to be Jacopo Peri’s *Dafne*, which debuted in 1597 in Florence.

⁴ “Travesti” literally means “disguised. It is a theatrical term which refers to a performer portraying a character of the opposite sex. It involves cross-dressing. Castrati, though gender ambivalent, were often still regarded as male, rather than a third sex. Therefore, castrati portraying female characters constituted travesti.

⁵ Additionally, the turn of the eighteenth century was an age of revolution and Enlightenment ideals in Europe. This shift also coincided with “[t]he solidifying of gender roles and categories as signs of innate, ‘natural,’ and complementary difference” (Leonardi and Pope 42).

⁶ Emily Pulley describes un-intimate opera: “But there are people [singers] who make a lot of money, and are huge household names, who’ve never had to give into that. There are people in the audience who don’t want to be touched, don’t want to be moved [...] and those are the type of singers...who really really really appeal to them. Because- it’s not. Actual. Emotion. It’s por-tray-ed emotion. And so, you get to pretend that you’re feeling things just as they’re pre-ten-ding to convey them. And you *think* you’ve had a profound experience, but it’s only moved you...in the way... it’s very artificial. (low and soft) In my opinion. I don’t believe anything can be transformative... about that experience.” (31 May 2014)

⁷ In interviews, my interlocutors often mirror Schechner’s theory of actors in performances as “not-me” but also “not not-me” (Schechner 1985, 109-113). In the case of “diva,” this sentiment echoes a legacy of opera singers’ deification.

⁸ Nina Eidsheim provides an extensive description of the practice of scientific study of the voice. Her documentation is more extensive than Koestenbaum’s, though she applies these practices to racialization rather than feminization of the voice. Both detail the anatomical “mapping out” of the singing body. See Nina Eidsheim, “Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance” (PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2008), 50-61. See also Koestenbaum, 1991, 209.

⁹ Citing the website www.operabase.com, Abbate and Parker report that between the 2005/2006 and the 2009/2010 opera season, the top five composers whose works were performed were Verdi (1813-1901), Mozart (1756-1791), Puccini (1858-1924), Wagner (1813-1883), and Rossini (1792-1868) (523). In the 2012/2013 season, Mozart and Puccini switched places, then switched back in the 2013/14 season.

¹⁰ Some scholars believe this is the only factor that distinguishes opera from other types of musical theatre. See Midgette 2007, 88.

¹¹ Operas were also transcribed into French in New Orleans (Levine 1988, 88).

¹² Opera has a long legacy of racism which continues in 2015, and Clément’s racism is no exception. Many non-white singers make their debuts in opera – or entire careers in opera – playing Other opera characters: Aida, Cio-Cio San (*Madama Butterfly*), Carmen, and Salome. Maria Ewing, the singer I discuss in this section, is known for her Carmen and Salome. My critical intervention into gendered Euro-classical voice follows from the growing critical scholarship on voice and race as restricting (Olwage 2004; Eidsheim 2008) and as liberating (Griffin 2004; Weheliye 2005).

¹³ I note here that Ewing’s chest voice is an opera chest voice. This type of register crossing is not common in bel canto opera. In the following chapter, I detail the dangers voice manuals construct around vocal crossing.

¹⁴ Emily Pulley uses the metaphor of singer-as-vessel as she defines “diva.” She says, “I feel like...the-the whole ethos, pathos, logos concept of rhetoric is true for performers, and you can...if you lose...your ethos...um, first of all, it shows a disdain for your colleagues and for the audience if you’re not prepared, or if it’s all about you. It’s- you can’t have pathos [emotional appeal], by definition, if you lose your ethos [credibility]. And you also can’t have logos because, it’s-it’s-y’know, it’s coming through a faulty vessel. You can’t- y’know, if you have not done the work, (glottal creak) and... you’re not...y’know, so for me, it’s selfish. It says that your own needs are above the needs of your colleagues, and the piece itself. That, to me, is a diva” (31 May 2014).

¹⁵ By “pure-tone,” I mean the timbral harmonic capacity of a flute. Flutes do not have as many potential harmonic frequencies as the human voice, making a flute’s timbre easily describable as “pure” or “clean.” For an ethnomusicological discussion of timbre, see Cornelia Fales (2002), “The Paradox of Timbre,” in *Ethnomusicology* 46(1), 56-95.

CHAPTER III
PROHIBITION THROUGH HETERONORMATIVE DISCOURSE IN VOICE
TRAINING MANUALS

Y'know, fear of the unknown can be very crippling, and so knowing how all of this is supposed to work and what's going on in there is very useful, so it's not just like, 'And then a miracle happens!' Y'know? [...] But some people, they just don't need to know. And they say, 'I do this and this sound comes out.' But I think for, um...so there's less fear of the unknown, I think education is always a good...I mean, it's good to err on the side of being overeducated than undereducated, knowing how things work. Just knowing your basic physics, and why...something may not be a good idea. Y'know, what happens if you...are coughing all the time – what is actually happening to your vocal cords? It also protects you from bad EMTs that are out there, which are, y'know – there are some out there that are so quick to give you a shot of steroids [...]. So I think it's necessary to know your – know your instrument. (Emily Pulley, 31 May 2014)

As a graduate of a liberal arts music program, I theorized my voice first and foremost through the pedagogical texts on my reading lists. I became well acquainted with the names James McKinney (1982), Richard Miller (1996), and Clifton Ware (1998). My own experience with voice manuals echoes the Euro-classical vocal pedagogy standard program of mediating embodied learning with text. Though any substantial vocal training also includes one-on-one instruction with a reputable voice teacher, written voice manuals partially constitute Euro-classical vocal pedagogy in

American conservatories and liberal arts institutions. Furthermore, if the students themselves do not seek out voice manuals, their teachers do, applying the techniques and ideas they find useful in their own studios. When I asked Emily Pulley what she thought of pedagogical texts, she replied that they were useful for “know[ing] your instrument.” Voice instruction, and voice manuals especially, hinge on what is forbidden or dangerous for the vocalist.

Following from Michel Foucault’s discussion of the formation of subjectivity through repression and constraint in *Technologies of the Self* (1988), voice manuals’ rhetorics of prohibition are instrumental as Euro-classical singers constitute themselves. In what follows, I detail how twentieth century Euro-classical singing manuals most often used in conservatories and universities¹ do not simply instruct the student on how to sing, but continually reference the body as a potential performer of “healthy” vocal sound that is unpredictable and easily compromised. The manuals advocate certain ways of conducting the self as necessary to being a singer; further, this rhetoric reaffirms the dichotomy of male and female. The physical, emotional, and mental well-being of the singer directly separates everyday practice into male-bodied or female-bodied experience.² I challenge these methods for training female voices and the patriarchal rhetoric that these formative texts present as fact. I do not intend to refute proven singing techniques that give the singer’s voice longevity and ease, but I will interrogate the training rhetoric in vocal literature that damages female singers’ subjectivity, even as it purports to help them bodily and vocally. I suggest a queering of training texts just as scholars have queered the image of the diva.

“Diagnosing the Self”

HANNAH. If someone wants to perform professionally, do you think they should have a knowledge of the pedagogical texts or not so much?

EMILY. mmm... I don't know. I mean, I think they should have a basic knowledge of... physiology, of the anatomy, so that if something feels funky...y'know, just for self-care – self-preservation. (31 May 2014)

In the rhetoric of the Euro-classical music tradition, performers “master” their instrument. To master in music is to have complete control over the sound an instrument emits; part of this control involves maintaining a good quality instrument. Violinists re-hair their bows, moderate the temperature and humidity to which they expose their instruments, and cleans rosin from the violin’s body. Similarly, singers perform maintenance rituals. However, singers’ instruments – that is, the thing making the sound – are their own bodies. Though the rhetoric of prohibition, singers learn to scrutinize their bodies in order to realize their “true vocal potential,” often described by these texts as the healthiest sound. These manuals advocate a perpetual state of what Foucault labels “a kind of permanent self-examination” (1988, 38). Though the prohibitions I discuss in this section are ostensibly gender neutral, I suggest female singers’ quest for virtuosity places them in a permanent state of scrutiny. This pursuit of virtuosity allows clearly gendered expectations of female voices to perpetuate unexamined. Such assertions reify the biological male/female body divide, as the singer’s most profound level of scrutiny occurs at the site of the body.

Many voice manuals first require singers to become excruciatingly self-aware in order to successfully sing. Clifton Ware contends that “[t]he good news is that individuals can compensate for both natural and acquired limitations; first, by becoming aware of them, and second, by developing constructive strategies to deal with specific problems” (1998, 196). Ware’s “good news” call to consciousness and consequent change of destructive habits exemplifies the common rhetoric in voice manuals that if a singer becomes aware of their vocal shortcomings, they change for the better. This call to self-scrutiny is remarkably similar what Foucault describes as the call to *exomologēsis* in Christianity (39-43). Through *exomologēsis*, people, of their own volition, approach the bishop and ask to assume the identity of sinner. In doing so, the reflexive sinner reconstitutes himself and performs a newly-penitent self. I do not mean to suggest that the life of a singer completely aligns with that of the confessed sinner, but there are striking similarities. Notably, these texts suggest that through practicing multi-leveled moderation, the singer can produce their most beautiful vocal sound.

Because their bodies are their instruments, the first level of prohibitive practice equates bodies with identity. In the first case, this involves what passes the threshold of that physical body. Clifton Ware warns the singer,

Though much vocal abuse is an unrelenting application of inappropriate technique, damage may also be the indirect result of negative personality characteristics and habits ingrained over one’s lifetime. For example, personal lifestyle habits associated with indigestion of unhealthy substances (fats, sweets, alcohol, caffeine, tobacco, drugs, environmental

pollution) can both directly and indirectly affect one's vocal condition.

(202-3)

In this excerpt, Ware notes the primary level of a singer's concern: that which passes into her body via her mouth and nose. Monitoring the boundary between the body and the outside world reaffirms the self as separate from the world and theorizes the body as a site of potential purity.³ Being aware of what goes in and out of the body extends from consciousness practices (eating and drinking) to unconscious practices (breathing). For the singer, the unconscious practice must move to the realm of the conscious. In other words, singers must live in a perpetual state of self-monitoring or else compromise their instrument. For Ware and many other authors of voice manuals, purity of temperament connects to purity of the voice. These "negative personality characteristics" and ingrained "habits," that Ware suggests the singer eschew, are similar to the Christian "morality of asceticism, [which] insists that the self is that which one can reject" (Foucault 1988, 22). When a singer rejects practices that prevent healthy singing, she then can become a better version of herself by renouncing destructive vocal practices. In his manual *Head First*, Birgit Nilsson admirer and professional tenor Denes Striny flips the notion that poor health causes bad singing, and suggests that bad singing causes poor health (2007, 42). Consequently, good singing can change a singer's health as they learn to sing more "purely" (43). He makes these claims based on his own experience as a professional singer and teacher. Thus Striny furthers Ware's conclusion by suggesting that there are two ways to approach singing: as an ascetic practice and as a holistic health practice. These two possibilities illuminate how vocal manuals construct singing

as both the singer's downfall and their salvation. Though not specifically gendered, theorizing the voice as first and foremost a practice of the body often leads to a conflation of gender for sex. Through this rhetoric, the singer becomes hyperaware of their body in space.

The second level of prohibitive practice manifests at the level of a singer's identity construction through voice. In effect, these manuals suggest that singers limit their expressive communicative repertoire in their daily life so that it aligns with their identity as a singer. Ware writes:

If a person's vocal image and identity are compatible with principles of efficient vocal production, the chances for misuse/abuse are minimized. Conversely, if a person's vocal image and identity are based on false presumptions and improper role models, the chances of vocal misuse/abuse are maximized. This single factor is perhaps the number one issue with which students and teachers must cope in developing a healthy, efficient voice technique. (201)

In the rhetoric of the training manual, there are infinite ways a singer can damage or compromise their voice, but only one healthy way to perform it. The healthy way is the way of the Euro-classical singing tradition, yet another instance of a singer's *exomologēsis*. In the moment that not-yet singers consciously approach a voice teacher, they confront the non-singer tendencies that were a part of their identity expression until that point. In a person's possible repertoire of self-expression and presentation, becoming a singer can affect the pitch at which a person speaks, how they pronounce

certain words, how they carry themselves, and what they like or dislike. In order to become their optimal singing selves, the almost-singers must reconstruct their identity at the level of the body.

This second aspect of body-as-identity solidifies through character in operatic repertoire. Because vocality and identity are inextricably linked, a Euro-classically-trained voice comes to enact one of a myriad of Euro-classical singing identities, called *Fächer* (s. *Fach*).⁴ The pool of potential identities dwindles as a singer becomes more learned in one vocal identity. These vocal categories correspond to certain performance repertoires in the world of opera. While a convenient way to describe what a voice sounds like, relegating a singer's voice to one *Fach* is reductive at best. This system works through the repertoire to perpetuate arbitrary, but never apolitical, categorizations of timbre. The *Fach* system privileges the scientific method to make assertions about how to healthfully perform the voice. To some extent, the *Fach* system describes body as well as voice. For example, Richard Miller describes the German lyric soprano as someone "to whom falls the majority of those *weiblich* (womanly) roles of the lyric theater which intimately appeal to the sympathies and emotions of the operagoer, appropriately displays more of the warmth the voice takes on when vibrato is present" (1997, 141). As Miller shows, a description of a specific *Fach* inevitably uses language that conjures the moralities of the characters certain voice parts play. In other words, it is no wonder that the infamous and morally suspect gypsy Carmen is a role for a mezzo soprano and her foil, the innocent and pure peasant girl Micaëla, is a role for a soprano. Miller's description of the lyric soprano voice as "warm" and "womanly" exposes how

vocal manuals describe sound based on what feelings they evoke for listeners. Cornelia Fales calls this phenomenon “timbral amnesia,” or the fact that listeners must often resort to metaphor or ambiguous language when describing the timbre of a sound (2002, 57). Miller’s analysis of the schools of singing is filled with discussions of what voices can or cannot do and what roles best fit certain voices, which inevitably connects singing identity with a composer. For example, the soprano who sings Wagner usually does not sing Rossini. In this way, sopranos receive training in order to sing certain repertoire, closing their vocal possibilities in other roles as audiences, teachers, and critics come to view them as Wagnerian or Rossinian voices. The singer is therefore interpolated into a relationship with repertoire that continues to re-inscribe her vocal identity within the tradition.

The Euro-classical vocal tradition mandates a two-fold awareness of the body and voice as essential to a singer’s subjectivity, thus prompting singers to construct subjectivities that are profoundly dependent on their bodies. According to Euro-classical vocal practice, singers must forge this connection for two reasons: to maintain their body as a sonic instrument and to place themselves within a vocal history. For these reasons, singers come to view themselves first and foremost as objects over which they must have complete control. In what follows, I describe how this ingrained awareness of the body is inherently gendered and reifies a male/female biological divide.

Female Voices and Roles in Professional Opera

CLARA. What is in the music is what makes the character believable, it's not what you physically see onstage, and that's always been the case with opera. It's why 40-year-old women can play Juliet – and why they should – because your voice isn't fully...mature until your for-thirties or forties. And so, even though Juliet is, what, supposed to be fourteen? (5 August 2014)

EMILY. There are things that are going to get easier and easier, and things that'll get harder and harder [...] and that's not my voice's fault (long pause) It's making peace with, "Oh I can't play that role anymore." [...] Yeah, I'm gonna hear the audience snicker if I try to play an 18 year old. (31 May 2014)

In the previous chapter, I explain how vocal sound is not necessarily connected to the size of the body, but that certain aspects of the female voice do correlate with age. In the Euro-classical tradition, “bigger” voices take longer to come into their own. Richard Miller observes:

In general, the larger the female instrument, the more time it takes to harness it. Soubrettes and coloraturas often display rather remarkable technical prowess at an early age, whereas at a similar age the potential *soprano lirico spinto* voice remains unwieldy. Just as with the later-maturing male voice, the female with a sizeable instrument should understand that her vocally lightweight female colleague can be expected to sing better at that age than she. It will comfort her to know that the more dramatic female voices often have a longer career expectancy,

making up for the slower rate of maturation that discourages her as a young adult. (1996, 177-8)

According to Miller, all voices are not created equal. Two phenomena that affect professional vocalists underlie Miller's observations. First, the pervasiveness of body-associated qualifiers in describing how a type of voice sounds; in this case, Miller refers to the "lightness" or "heaviness" of a singing voice. "Heaviness" and "lightness," while technically used as objective qualifiers of sound quality or "body" of the sound in voice manuals, can have positive or negative connotations for a singer depending on her social context. Miller does not consider how this "slower rate of maturation" may correlate with how young American female singers equate voice and body. Second, the correlation between the age of the singer and quality of voice, while important in the professional opera world, is not as inherent as Miller supposes. It is a fiction that "lighter" voices are younger and "heavier" voices are older. Miller's argument is, in part, a biological one. A child has a higher voice than an adult, and like the male voice, the female voice undergoes maturation so an adult female has a slightly lower voice than a pre-pubescent female. Composers write characters' voice parts within opera's historical context, which augments reality. They write young girl characters—maids, ingénues, young peasant girls—as soubrette voice types.⁵ Miller's assertion that "heavier" voices take longer to mature and have longer careers is detrimental to both the "lighter" and "heavier" female voices because the majority of female roles in frequently-performed operas are for the "light" sopranos.⁶ Perpetuating the myth that younger singers sound "lighter" prevents older sopranos who have "lighter" voices to play the heroines of many

operas. The lighter voices only have shorter career expectancies because, as Emily Pulley notes in the section's opening quote, directors are not interested in hiring a 40-year-old Minnie. Sentiments like this are harmful to a female Euro-classical singer because rather than critique the biases in professional performance, they transfer the impetus onto the relatively unchangeable female singing voice.

Though female voices currently perform castrato roles, there is a movement in the vocal profession for countertenors to "reclaim" those roles. Colin Baldy asserts,

as techniques have developed and people have begun to understand the voice more, counter-tenors are starting to perform the great coloratura roles in eighteenth-century opera. Compromises are required, because the range isn't the same as that of a castrato, but it is a relief to see men singing male roles in Handel's operas rather than have them transformed into trouser roles to be sung by women. (There is a difference between trouser roles specifically written for women and roles originally written for male castrati, since the latter are invariably heroic, and quite different from those of, say, Octavian in *Der Rosenkavalier* or Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*). (2010, 132)

Baldy responds to the prevalence of women playing castrati roles from a branch of performance practice whose primary concern is historical accuracy. Therefore, Baldy considers a performance more accurate when a male-bodied person performs an originally male-bodied part. The main problem with this logic is that castrati were not male-bodied performers. Castrati had neither male nor female bodies. The lack of

androgens (male sex hormones) stunted penis growth and male body hair patterns, and initiated fat deposits in the hips and chest. Castrati were freakishly tall. Their bodies were fusions of male and female body proportions, not truly female- nor truly male-bodied. The opera industry should not relegate female singers to roles written with these prejudices. As I mention in the previous chapter, female voices and bodies in castrati roles are inherently queer. Men playing the castrati roles take work away from female singers. Counter-tenors “taking back” the castrato roles does not more accurately portray “heroism” in opera. It simply removes the queering potential from opera, which according to the dominant discourse on divas, is one of opera’s most worthwhile qualities.⁷

Lastly, training manuals reference female bodies as inherently ill-suited to beautiful vocal sound. Clifton Ware makes the most explicit reference to female bodies as inherently problematic instruments for the Euro-classical vocal tradition. Because the voice is profoundly dependent on the body’s endocrine system, the amount and type of hormones pumping through a person affects their voice in terms of pitch, as well as being part of what makes a body male or female (Ware 1998, 204; Harrison 2006, 139). While male and female are inherent biologic categories, rhetoric on endocrinal shifts in female bodies is not inherent. Ware, whether intentionally or not, labels the female endocrinal fluctuations during menstruation, menopause, and pregnancy as “vocal disorders” because they alter the female voice (Ware 1998, 204-5). Of the six total vocal disorders he lists, three are specific to women, two can affect both sexes, and one disorder only affects males. Authors of voice manuals do not consider the change the

male voice undergoes during puberty as a disorder, though most recommend a male not begin training his voice until after it has mostly changed. Ware frames the monthly voice-shift in female singers as preventing women from singing at their greatest potential. Female bodies become ticking vocal time bombs, fluctuating monthly, and susceptible to drastic, permanent change which compromises a female singer's vocal desirability.

The Dangers of Voice Crossing

CLARA. I think that — that same person, a very talented person, is able to... experiment with making sounds that aren't necessarily the "right" way to play, and still be considered talented. ... Or still be considered playing – correctly. Like, belting is super popular now, but I'll kill my voice if I do that....

HANNAH. Because you're a soprano?

CLARA. Right. That's just how my voice is. (2 August 2014)

In order to discuss the female voice in vocal pedagogy, I consider how pedagogical literature rhetorically constructs high-register performances of the male voice as female, and as undesirable in its female-ness. The majority of published examples about sensory singing experience come from male authors with male-bodied experiences of singing. Though male vocalists train female singers – and male- and female-bodied singers undoubtedly feel some similar sensations when vocalizing – male and female bodies differ in embodied experience of sound. This is an important distinction in vocal pedagogy because singers' own bodies are their instruments.

Vocal manuals present potential emasculation and feminization of Euro-classical male voices as negative. In a passing comment on the consequences of choosing the right/wrong voice teacher, renowned and oft-cited vocal scholar Richard Miller warns, “One recalls ... the *leggiero* tenor teacher whose *baritones sound emasculated or excessively bright* [emphasis added]” (1996, 243). Miller’s qualification of the hypothetical baritone’s sound emasculated by the *leggiero* tenor instructor derives from the opera characters these two voice parts most often play. The *leggiero* voice is the “lightest” tenor voice that accesses the normal falsetto range in full voice.⁸ This tenor tends to play the hero in Italian late-eighteenth- and early- to- mid-nineteenth-century opera, but this type of heroic voice fell out of style with the emergence of the Verdian/Wagnerian dramatic tenor, thus changing what it meant to be vocally masculine. Additionally, Clifton Ware says under the category “Other hormonal disturbances,” in his section on vocal illness, “endocrine disturbances may result in voice alterations; for example, pancreatic dysfunction causing *xerophonia* (dry voice) and thymic abnormalities that lead to voice feminization” (1998, 205). Despite biological constraints, the vocal cords, and by extension the human body, have a wide range of potential, thus the male and female voices can overlap in range. In Ware’s assertion, the feminine voice is once again a sick voice for men rather than a voice that can perform a different kind of vocal literature. Female voice in a male body, or even the suggestion of female voice in male body, constitutes a dangerous – and queer – space in Euro-classical vocal training texts.

Because the “unnaturally” high male voice is undesirable, voice manuals warn against the danger of the male voice being feminized either by poor training or medical disorder. Many of these assertions hinge on what is “natural” and “healthy” for singers, which tend to be the same for both men and women; however, the male and female vocal apparatuses are inherently different insofar as male and female bodies are biologically different. What complicates this even further is that like the body, the voice is a highly versatile technology of performance (Eidsheim 2008). Male and female ranges overlap. Though somewhat limited by biology, vocality in the Euro-classical tradition is primarily learned. Suzanne Cusick discusses this gendered aspect of vocal performance. She notes how men have the ability to perform their voices in a woman’s register, but the repertoire requires them to re-learn how to perform their voices in a deeper (read “manly”) register. She concludes that

[t]he act of singing a song is always an act that replicates acceptance of patterns that are intelligible to one’s cohort in a culture. Thus it physically re-enacts, deep in the throat, the transaction that Eurocentric development theory asserts as the one that creates a gendered subjectivity. (30)

If vocality (voice performativity) follows bodies (they are, after all, deeply of the body), this challenges a fundamental assertion in Euro-classical pedagogy that men and women’s voices require different styles of training (Miller 1996, 150). These texts negate the aesthetic efficacy of the “feminized” male voice at the same time they forbid female Euro-classical singers to explore the lower, i.e. “masculine” register of their voices.

Teachers in the Euro-classical tradition theorize the voice in sections, called “vocal registers” or *passaggi* (s. *passaggio*). These are the naturally occurring breaks in the human voice. According to Jerome Hines in *The Four Voices of Man* there are four breaks, which he labels by number. Euro-classical male singers usually perform in their lower three vocal registers, and women perform in their upper three registers (Hines 1997, xxii-i). Men leave out their *falsetto* register and women their raw chest register. In musical terms, a woman’s raw chest register exists below the range of F#3 (mezzo soprano) or A#3 (coloratura soprano), but her entire chest voice extends to a D#4 or an F#4 (49). Hines identifies two more registers above these; they are jointly referred to as “head voice,” which is considered the superior method of vocal production.

Chest voice is often associated with danger and illness, whereas head voice is the healthy and ideal way of realizing a voice’s potential. According to Denes Striny, female singers singing in chest voice can make them anxious and stressed (2007, 50). For Striny, this method of vocal production is an illness that leads to other sorts of physical, mental, and emotional maladies. He asserts, “The power of the head voice is superior to any other way of singing” (52). Head voice is deemed “correct” and chest voice “incorrect.” It is a biological fact in vocal literature that “incorrect” singing leads to contact ulcers, vocal nodules, polyps, cysts, Reinke’s Edema, and/or vocal-fold hemorrhage.⁹ These are serious concerns for professional singers as they compromise the longevity of their careers. While the male and female voice can equally develop these issues, Euro-classical vocal texts most often caution female singers. Richard Miller reminds voice instructors:

With regards to the teaching of female students by males, some aspects of vocal sound may be usefully demonstrated in *false*to, because false

(which by no means is the same as the so-called “head voice” of historic, traditional vocal pedagogy) is the sound imitative of the female voice, of which most males are fully capable. [...]. *The varying energy levels between males and females* is often best imitated for female students by the male in false

to voice. It is also the case that many female singers have success demonstrating so-called chest voice for their male singers, *although out of regard for the teacher’s own vocal health caution must be exercised. An occasional demonstration by a female teacher of the kind of energy and timbre she uses in chest or chest mixtures can be useful (although not absolutely necessary) in teaching the young male singer* [emphasis added] (1996, 242).

This passage brings two aspects of teaching rhetoric to the fore: 1) males can successfully and healthfully imitate female vocal sound and 2) females are able to imitate male voices, but such imitation endangers their voices. Miller calls attention to the “varying energy levels between males and females”; his lack of further explanation suggests that the reader must take it as fact. This could possibly refer to the energy required to produce a Euro-classical voice, but there is no research supporting an inherently different energy required by males versus females in vocal production. Miller suggests the male teacher imitating female voice is necessary for the female student, whereas the male voice imitation is “not absolutely necessary” for him to understand a

concept. More subtly (whether for word variation or subconscious bias), Miller maintains the male-teacher female-student power dynamic in his prose, but female-teacher male-student evens out into female-singer and male-singer. Though Miller eventually refers to the female voice instructor as “teacher,” he never labels the male subordinate “student.” Finally, Miller warns that “out of regard for the teacher’s own vocal health caution must be exercised.” Nowhere does he label falsetto singing as dangerous, though as I detail in the previous section, many manuals consider it undesirable. Though there is little evidence that singing in chest voice or “belting” produce any of the aforementioned vocal maladies, Miller cautions the female singer. The pervasive rhetoric of females’ use of chest and belt voice as dangerous to themselves stems from a feminine vocal ideal in Euro-classical pedagogy.

Teachers split the head and chest voice in Euro-classical singing, and I suspect there are two interpretations of why this split is particularly problematic for the female singer. The first is due to the gendered vocal performance aesthetic perpetuated by the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century repertoire of the Euro-classical canon. Unless a student is in a specialized voice program, the beginning Euro-classical vocalist in America learns vocal performance through the songs of W. A. Mozart (1756-1791), Franz Schubert (1797-1828), and Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924).¹⁰ These composers wrote for the voice in a particular way. Mozart, Schubert, and Fauré gently prompt student singers to perform in their head voices. For nearly all singers, this means sustaining a tessitura drastically higher than their speaking register, so audiences can hear them in huge halls. Furthermore, a singer has many performance choices for her voice: tone

color, timbre, phrasing, nasality, resonance, and others, but in the tradition, she cannot change the notes a composer writes. There is a marked difference between Euro-classical male and female voices in terms of speaking voice versus singing voice. The National Center for Voice and Speech (NCVS) reports the average female speaking voice is around 200 Hz (about G3) and the male speaking voice is around 125 Hz (about B2) (Titze 1994); these numbers are widely recognized in speech pathology research (Traunmüller and Eriksson 1995). In Euro-classical singing, the female voice normally sings anywhere between F3 (174.6 Hz) and C6 (1046.5 Hz) and the male voice sings between an E2 (82.4 Hz) and C5 (523.25 Hz).¹¹ The difference I want to draw out from these numbers is the 440.85 Hz. span in the male voice as opposed to the 871.9 Hz. span in the female voice. Additionally, the highest note a female voice produces in the repertoire has roughly an 800 Hz. difference from her speaking voice, whereas the highest male note has a difference less than half that amount. Considering Euro-classical vocal performance in relation to the inherent (that is, most comfortable or natural) male and female speaking voices, this discrepancy shows the performative prompting of Euro-classical repertoire. The rhetoric of the “unhealthy” chest voice is in direct contradiction to the actual sonic speech average of the human female. Clifton Ware refutes this argument, indicating that women, especially American women, speak at an unnaturally low frequency or permanently perform their voices lower to sound “more sensuous” (1998, 65). Barring Ware’s assumption that the primary reason a woman might want to lower her voice is tied to her sexual desirability, he provides no evidence that performing

the voice at a higher frequency is any less damaging than performing it at a lower frequency.

Secondly, the way texts construct the chest voice as perilous proves more effective for female singers than male singers. This argument involves an abstract consideration of power hierarchies in vocal production, but it is useful in that it directly engages the cavities of the bodies Euro-classical singers use to phonate. The chest and subglottal airways, the pharynx and the oral cavity, and the larynx are the primary parts of the human body able to phonate (called “resonators”). The most privileged of these in Euro-classical training is the pharynx and oral cavity, as they are the resonating cavities a person can control (Ware 1998, 140-1). A singer cannot control the resonance potential of the chest, so Ware asserts it is unimportant. Striny echoes this in the title of his monograph, *Head First*, bolstering the predominant argument that the chest has no creative potential in Euro-classical vocal pedagogy. A singer achieves “pure” sound in the head voice, and composers write for more of a female’s head voice range than a male’s head voice range. In other words, Euro-classically-trained female voices more often perform in head voice than their male-voiced counterparts. Rhetorically using a woman’s chest as a site of deviant vocal production has particular implications for female-bodied people whose lived experience, especially in America, is breasted. Iris Young theorizes the chest as a “rarely neutral” body part for women, directly tied to a woman’s identity and sense of self (2005, 76). Vocally, there is great pleasurable potential in the chest voice. Women access this register to produce growls, perform power ballads in non-Euro-classical musical genres, and accentuate timbral differences

across *passaggi*.¹² Furthermore, the vibration of the chest resonating is in itself pleasurable. By barring women from accessing their chest voices through repertoire and rhetoric of vocal damage, Euro-classical female singers do not actually access their voices' "true potential." Rather, the resonating female body is a danger to herself and vocally displeasing.

Just as the male voice should not evoke the feminine, so the female voice should not evoke the masculine. In an example similar to those on the feminization of male voice, Ware cautions the female singer against accidentally deepening her voice when treating bronchitis: "Androgens should also be avoided because they can deepen a female voice and limit the high range" (213). Clearly, vocally crossing sexes is not an option. Such gender crossing in vocal performance is dangerous and harmful to the singer. This is partly practical; if singers train their voices one way and their voices change drastically in a short period of time, they must spend time and money retraining their new voices. Additionally, the repertoire deemed appropriate for these singers can shift, which can be traumatic. Voice manuals consider fluctuation a natural part of a beginning singer's vocal journey, but later on in life, vocal oscillation is not as easily accommodated. Vocal professionals particularly feel this pressure.

Conclusion

Euro-classical voice manuals frame the singer's body as integral to their identity, with their vocal success dependent on their maintenance of a pure body and heteronormative voice. Similar to Foucault's description of Christianity's *exomologēsis*,

voice manual authors encourage the singer to recognize impure practices destructive to singing, so they may become successful singers. Consequently, a singer constructs her identity based on this maxim of restriction, which occurs at the corporeal level.

Furthermore, the sexed body becomes a vocal necessity in the Euro-classical tradition; thus, vocally queering the body is dangerous and destructive to a singer's well-being.

Paradoxically, this is at odds with the queer discourse on the opera diva. Her efficacy for audiences partially depends on her ability to queer either a character, a scene, or a performance space. Even as her body and voice become sites of queer possibility, her own tradition relegates her to a particular, prohibitive way of being. In actual daily life, however, a singer does not always abide by the rules laid out in a vocal manual. In the following chapter, I analyze the lived experiences of three sopranos and how and when restrictive practices emerge in their lives.

¹ I determined the most-used manuals by reviewing required texts and recommended reading for vocal pedagogy classes at universities and conservatories throughout the United States. The syllabi surveyed are listed in the bibliography (Howell 2013; Kerlin 2011; Simon 2012; Wenner 2013; Wood 2011).

² These practices concerning body, voice, temperament, and character align with the popular perceptions of diva-ness outlined in my previous thesis chapter. Regarding the profound literature on Euro-classical opera divas, the intervention I make in my analysis is twofold. Firstly, I suggest a queering of training texts just as scholars have queered the image of the diva (Koestenbaum 1991; 1993). Secondly, I analyze the "backstage" practices of diva production in the same way scholars theorize her presence in literature (Leonardi and Pope, 1996) and on past or current opera stages (Cowgill and Poriss, 2012).

³ Judith Butler theorizes bodily boundaries in terms of sex using Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966), saying "Douglas alludes to 'a kind of sex pollution which expresses a desire to keep the body (physical and social) intact,' suggesting that the naturalized notion of 'the' body is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discrete by virtue of its stable boundaries. Further, the rites of passage that govern various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of gendered exchange, positions, and erotic possibilities" (1990, 132-3).

⁴ *Fach* literally translates as "compartment" or "object of study." Specifically, I refer to the subcategories of soprano specifically, though the *Fach* system categorizes all voices. Notably, the soprano *Fach* has the most subcategories. These, as with all identities, shift and fade, but the most concrete distinctions are between soprano and mezzo soprano. It is possible to further break down soprano into dramatic, spinto, coloratura, soubrette, and lyric. More subcategories are possible. The vocal hierarchy prizes the higher and

more agile voices for their “spectacular” sonic brilliance in performance. Furthermore, there is a greater amount of operatic repertoire for soprano voices than for mezzo soprano and even fewer for contralto voices (McGinnis 2010).

⁵ Occasionally, composers deviate from the norm or radically change what voice audiences associate with what role (castrato hero to tenor hero), but these are male voice parts (Poriss 2009).

⁶ As I reference in n. 20, the most common operas performed are by Mozart, Rossini, Puccini, Verdi, and Wagner. Mozart, Rossini, and even Puccini favored the “lighter” female voices (coloratura soprano and lyric soprano). Verdi favored the spinto soprano, which falls in between the “light” and “heavy” sound. Only Wagner favored the dramatic soprano, the truly “heavy” sounding voice.

⁷ For a even more detailing of erotic queer experience of opera, see the introduction of Leonardi and Pope (1996, 11-23) Koestenbaum’s intimate narrative on “Opera Queens” (1993, 9-45), and Clemens Risi’s article on bodily participation (2011).

⁸ “Full voice” refers to singers using their entire bodies or the majority of their bodies’ resonance space. It is the physically vibrating body, or in Euro-classical terms, the body operating at its full potential.

⁹ Contact ulcers are blisterlike lesions on the posterior section of the vocal folds. Vocal nodules, the most dreaded malady of singers, are tiny hemorrhages on the vocal fold that become thickened with fibrous tissue. They cause hoarseness, breathiness, loss of range and vocal fatigue. Smokers are especially susceptible to vocal polyps, which are acute lesions, often requiring surgery. Vocal cysts, Reinke’s Edema, and vocal-fold hemorrhaging are rarer for Euro-classical singers (Ware 1998, 214-5).

¹⁰ To clarify, teachers often use Mozart to introduce young singers to opera, Schubert as an introduction to German *lieder*, and Fauré to French *chanson*. I inform my sweeping statement as to the general era of young singers’ performance repertoire through my own vocal study at a liberal arts institution, my colleagues’ vocal study at liberal arts institutions and conservatories, and Hal Leonard voice anthologies for young singers, which I have listed in the bibliography.

¹¹ These ranges account for all female and male voice types, barring the extremely rare contralto, coloratura soprano, and countertenor range, which baritone singers perform in a well-developed falsetto.

¹² Chest resonance is also a large part of critical scholarship on race and voice (Griffin 2004). The Euro-classical tradition has a long legacy of using the “head voice method” of vocal production to discipline deviant bodies (Olwage 2004).

CHAPTER IV

“DIVAS” SPEAK: “DIVA” IN NARRATIVE AND CONCLUSIONS

During rehearsals for *Anna Bolena* at Opéra National de Bordeaux in June 2014, mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke recorded a YouTube video giving advice to aspiring opera singers. She says,

Singer life is pretty crazy. You wear...funny wigs, and sometimes you look like this [cut to her in bloody stage make-up]. (long pause) Mhm. Or you're...kissing a stranger, or you're finding an apartment in a strange city where you don't speak the language, or you're meeting someone basically all the time. And putting on a good face (not like this) and making a good impression. It's tricky. And you're always shuffling things. It's always this matter of balance, right, finding balance. So – I encourage you to embrace the challenges and see those as a means to getting closer to yourself. At the end of the day, all you have really is yourself. And if you're not happy, it will show in your music. And if you're doubting, it will show in your music. So...connect with that deep [shakes head back and forth] inside place, and check in. Regularly. Because the world of singing is a [phone alarm beeps] tricky and...lonely one. And one must have a good relationship with theirself. (Cooke 2014a)

In this video, Cooke stresses that managing her singing career is about finding balance.

Cooke's advice is actually more profound than a cliché about finding life zen. As I have

detailed in the previous chapter, the institution of Euro-classical vocal pedagogy (hetero)normalizes vocal practice and constructs the female body as dangerous. Euro-classical singers, however, are intimately part of this institution. Even as Euro-classical singers' relationship to their repertoire shifts and changes throughout their careers, they continue to construct their identities tactically, using an abstract idea of "opera diva" as reference.

In this chapter, I analyze the narratives of three different female singers in three different stages of their Euro-classical careers. Clara Johnson is a student soprano in her final year of voice study in a liberal arts voice program. Sasha Cooke is a Grammy-award-winning mezzo-soprano at arguably the peak of her career. Emily Pulley is a Metropolitan Opera veteran who is in the process of renegotiating her opera career. In order to better understand how singers relate to opera as an institution, I use personal interviews I conducted with Emily Pulley and Clara Johnson between May and August 2014. Though Sasha Cooke and I were in contact via e-mail during this time, we were unable to schedule an interview due to her demanding schedule. Consequently, I will reference interviews Cooke gave for popular publications such as *The Classical Singer* and *The New York Times*. I also consider YouTube videos of Cooke, such as the one referenced above. I connect the experiences of these three singers through Matthew Rahaim's theory of a paramparic body, which connects singers in an embodied way to the tradition they study. Using Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson's multilevel strategic model of analyzing personal narrative, I consider how my interlocutors convey embodied experience through narrative and cohere disparate feelings and subjectivities

through narrative construction. After providing my interlocutors' biographies and further explaining the theories of Rahaim, Langellier and Peterson, I organize my intervention into three sections: how singers narrate moments of relegation, how singers perpetuate the Euro-classical institution through narrative, and how singers narrate their subjectivity in relation to this institution. In considering singers' narratives through the lens of embodied prohibitions, I call for scholars to consider how Euro-classical training and the institution of opera inextricably shape a singer's subjectivity.

The Singers

Clara Johnson is a double major in music and veterinary science at Texas A&M University, a combination that would be impossible in a conservatory-style music program. Although this dual-major is possible, it makes Clara's academic life her whole life. She started attending Houston Grand Opera (HGO) summer camps when she was twelve years old, and debuted in her first national, HGO opera when she was fourteen. After carving out a place at HGO but failing to earn admittance to their scholarship program for aspiring singers, Clara reluctantly accepted a smaller scholarship from a Christian university in Texas. In her first year, Clara's voice professor told her she would never be anything but a soubrette, a minor (weak-voiced) soprano role. Devastated, Clara dropped out of the Christian university and enrolled at TAMU Galveston for two years to pursue a veterinary science degree. She eventually transferred to TAMU College Station and started to study voice in conjunction with her science degree. As of February 2015, she is the most experienced singer in the Texas A&M

voice studio, and is planning to complete the music component of her dual degree in May 2015. She will complete the veterinary science portion in December 2015, and plans to pursue a graduate degree in veterinary science.

Mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke started piano lessons when she was four, and began playing the viola and singing in choirs when she was ten. After high school, she studied voice at Rice University, where she thought she would eventually major in engineering. Cooke describes her time with her voice teacher at Rice as one of her most formative experiences.

The best revelation actually happened quite early on. I said to her, “Kathy [Kaun], I want to sound like *Queen of the Night*, I want to sound like the sopranos, like all those other girls”, and she just told me, “it’s good to be different”. And that’s really what she pushed the whole time, and I’m grateful for that. (Cooke 2012)

She pursued her Master’s Degree at the Julliard School, where she became popular among composers for her willingness and ability to perform new musical works. Cooke began her relationship with the Metropolitan Opera through the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program and made her Met debut in November 2007 as the Second Priestess in C. W. Gluck-Guillard’s *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Less than a year later, Cooke’s fame skyrocketed when composer John Adams requested her to play Kitty Oppenheimer in his new opera *Doctor Atomic*. In 2012, Cooke won the Grammy for Best Opera Recording along with her co-star Thomas Glenn for the same opera. Cooke specializes

as a recitalist, but she also frequently performs opera, especially new operas. In February 2015, she premiered the role of Jan Hall in *Everest* at The Dallas Opera.

Metropolitan Opera veteran Emily Pulley's introduction to opera illustrates her personality and relationship to music in general. She began her musical career as a self-described junior high band geek. In her freshman year of high school, she joined her school choir and her 9th-grade regional choir. When she graduated to the 10-grade choir, she switched to singing alto. Her high school hired a new choir teacher in Pulley's junior year, who was of the mind that he would work as hard as the students wanted to work. Pulley describes the experience as a new opportunity: "It was a blank slate [with him]. I wasn't one of 'the chosen' y'know?" (Pulley 31 May 2014). With her new teacher's support, Pulley made Texas All-State Choir her junior and senior year as an Alto II.¹ In what she describes as her "Forest-Gumpian career path," Pulley went to study with her high school teacher's voice professor at West Texas University. She jokes, "the last words out of my mouth were, 'I wanna study voice, just not any of that opera crap'." At the end of her undergraduate career, she won the Midland Odessa competition, and took it as a sign to continue onto a master's program in voice at North Texas University after a friend recommended Pulley study with a teacher there. She finished her degree in 1992, and moved back home to College Station. She sang in the Brazos Valley Chorale, performed with a local folk band, and led two church choirs. Within a year of returning home, Pulley received a NYC Metropolitan Opera audition flyer in the mail. She says of her decision to audition, "I figured I had nothing to lose." Pulley won the district audition, and then the regional audition the next day. She went to New York City, where

she became one of the eight winners and two sopranos of the 1993 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She made her Met debut in 1994 as the Danish Lady in Benjamin Britten's *Death in Venice*. After covering the role of Julie La Verne in San Francisco Opera's production of *Showboat* in June 2014, Pulley booked the role of Bea in UrbanAria's *Three Decembers*. As of February 2015, she balances musical theatre, such as *Sweeney Todd* at Madison Opera, with small recitals.

Narrative and the Pamparic Body

To connect Johnson, Cooke, and Pulley, I apply the idea of a paramparic body as theorized by Matthew Rahaim and apply it to the Euro-classical tradition. These women share embodied knowledge as informed by repetitions of Euro-classical vocal technique and repertoire. In his study of classical Hindustani singing technique, Rahaim describes a paramparic body and its theoretical application: "The term paramparic body [is] useful [...] in addressing embodied musical dispositions that are passed down through generations of teachers and students, with no single recognizable author" (2012, 108). Rahaim's "paramparic body" resonates with Judith Butler's idea of performativity; the ideal female Euro-classical singer has no beginning, no material originator, though training texts attempt to construct one (Miller 1997; Baldy 2010). Euro-classical singers who trained primarily in the United States, while partially basing their vocal and bodily performances on their diva idols, are similar to Hindustani singers in that they trace their vocal skill through their teacher(s).² Unlike Rahaim's paramparic body whose iterations reflect those of a certain teacher's lineage, my interlocutors' paramparic bodies are

grounded in their shared vocal tradition. This is one of the reasons why Euro-classical singers may have somatic responses (straightening their spine, elongating their throat, loosening their jaw) when they hear someone else sing in that style. Though these singers do not share the same teacher, they all grew up and studied in the state of Texas. They (and I) also share similar experiences as white women, insofar as we never experienced categorizing of their voices based on our race or ethnicity.³ Though individual experiences differ, I view my interlocutors' narratives as evoking a "paramparic body" that both resists and reaffirms the Euro-classical institution.

To make sense of these singers' narratives, I use Kristin M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson's method of analyzing personal narrative to draw out how the personal and the institutional emerge in a singer's construction of self. Following from the narrative work of Dell Hymes and Richard Bauman, Langellier and Peterson suggest a multilevel strategic model for thinking about narrative as a performance. They elaborate that this method is useful in two ways. First, it "offers the advantage of a way to explore the complexities of narrative performance without collapsing or reducing narrative to oppositions between dominant and counter-discourses. What operates as resistance at one level may fail to function in the same way at other levels" (2006, 179). The individual and the institution are inseparable in this way. Second, Langellier and Peterson explain, "A strategic model also has the advantage of de-emphasizing the tendency in research to privilege individuals as the origin or source of narratives. Instead, a strategic model emphasizes the circulation of investments, desires, and subjectivities inscribed in particular performances" (179). While I trust and respect my

interlocutors' opinions, they are not necessarily representative of every female opera singers' experience. These narratives are performances in that interviews are staged, and the three singers and I play various roles throughout this process. At times, my interlocutors become the interviewers and I am soliloquizing. I have varying relationships with my interlocutors, with Sasha Cooke being my most distant and Clara Johnson my most familiar. Additionally, what my interlocutors say connects to what they do not say. In this case, I employ Langellier and Peterson's definition of narrative as performance to gesture towards what remains unsaid, implied, or unsayable. I view my interlocutors first and foremost as co-authors who helped me think through my own Euro-classical training and reservations about opera as an art form.

How Singers Experience Euro-classical Vocal Institution Restrictions

Clara, Sasha, and Emily never mention feeling restricted in terms of their voices or singing technique. Their self-narrated feelings of restriction derive from anxieties about their bodies. Moreover, they do not view these anxieties as something inherent about Euro-classical singing. They frequently name the amorphous "opera culture" as the source policing women's bodies. It is worthy to note here that Clara has a different relationship to critique because she is a voice student rather than a professional singer. Consequently, her stories deviate from Cooke's and Pulley's because she does not feel like an authority on the subject. In this section, I suggest that policing becomes more and more embodied the farther along in their careers these singers are. This abstraction is a

rhetorical tactic that signals repeated instances of restriction. If an action constantly repeats, it becomes almost impossible to distinguish individual instances of prohibition.

The second time I spoke with Clara, we sat on the floor in one of the larger practice rooms in the Liberal Arts building on the Texas A&M College Station campus. She tells me a story about her first time competing at the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) competition.

I haven't had too many awful, horrible critiques of my voice. I've had a few. [...] the other one that I remember – [...] that was at um, I tried NATS for the first time, I think in high school, and...um, I wore (scoff) I wore a dress and uh, I- it- I had a cardigan or a scarf over it or something, and it had been sleeveless. And...I realized that the cardigan was getting in the way of the performance – of my movement. [...] And so I took it off for the performance. And...um...And I sang – I mean, I'm not saying I sang perfectly, but it was – it was pretty good. Especially for a high school performance – [...] basically one of the judges had written...um...y'know, 'your – your dress is completely inappropriate. Sleeves. Please.' And he underlined sleeves please. [...] that was really – it was really hurtful. In fact it even hurt worse than the comments like, y'know, 'You didn't quite hit that note,' or 'you need to have more space,' or...all the – all the positive critiques – that still hurt whenever you get them in competitions – but that was just...hurtful. (5 August 2014)

Though there are multiple judges in Clara's story, the most negatively affecting critique came from the judge who censored her dress. Clara prefaces the judge's comment by being sure to tell me what her performance sounded like (I'm not saying I sang perfectly, but [...] it was pretty good.") I will continue my analysis of Clara's story in the following section.

In the professional arena, teachers are not the authority figures; rather, singers identify opera producers and casting directors as the arbiters of discretion in terms of a singer's looks. In an interview Sasha Cooke gave with an online music publication, she describes how appearance plays into casting decisions.

It's [the opera climate's] now very much about how you look and people cast based on how you look. I'd say that this is pretty true. [...] It's a bit sad because if I had been auditioning and singing thirty years ago or so, there might be many more roles that I would have already done. But now, it's more about the type that you are physically, and whether or not you suit that role. (Cooke 2012)

Cooke's statements are different from Clara's in that they are more polished and staged; Cooke responds to interviewers in a semi-professional setting, and my interviews with Clara were extremely casual. I also consider Cooke's statements through a second filter; someone has already cleaned-up her words and picked out the quotes that best reflect the mission of the article. Consequently, Cooke's words are even more aligned with institutional regulation in that they are already filtered through popular publications in the opera world. Cooke brings up a common theme in interviews with opera singers, and

my interviews with Clara and Emily Pulley: opera used to be different. Of course, theatre is about bodies on stage, so appearance was and has always been a consideration in opera. What surfaces in Cooke's anecdote is nostalgia for a time when opera was truly about what a woman sounded like and not what she looked like. Langellier and Peterson analyze nostalgia in the context of family narratives, describing how families conditionally disclose instances of deviance (2004, 51). They focus on how people construct meaning through the ordering of narrative. If I consider Cooke's temporal shifts, she begins in the present ("people cast based on how you look"), and then moves to the conditional past ("If I can been auditioning and singing thirty years ago"). She then speaks of the past's future ("there might be many more roles that I would have already done"). Cooke is making sense of the present state of opera through the conditional in which there was once a time where appearance did not determine employability. This interview excerpt shows a professional singer making sense of the irrational restrictions on her ability to play certain characters whose vocal line she may excel at singing.

Emily (she insists I call her Emily) meets me outside a café and creperie in San Francisco. We sit at a two-person table on the far-left side of the mostly empty café. In general, Emily is free with her opinions, and she is a wealth of information about opera and the opera industry. She also has a knack for equating the opera industry to a strange romantic relationship.

The similarities between...having a singing career and having a successful dating career are *depressingly* obvious. When are you most

attractive to- whoever you're trying to attract? When you could care less. How many times do I want to punch people in the face for saying "when you're not looking, that's when it's going to happen," it's like, "Screw you." But it's true – walk into an audition, not caring if you get the job or not, is one of the *strongest* (laughing) things. Y'know there's that great line from broadcast news, it's like, "wouldn't it be great, if like, needy were a turn on?" [...] and the fact that there's this double standard for men and women, it's *very* present. (31 May 2014)

Here Emily conveys frustration with a power matrix to which she is always subservient. "Screw you" is not only directed at the "people," but at the entire auditioning process. Though Emily catches herself and says "whoever you're trying to attract" rather than "a guy," she still depicts opera as a heteronormative relationship. She feels that there are different sets of rules for men and women, and the rules favor men. Emily describes the ultimate audition as successfully playing coy, pretending she does not want the part. For her, this is how confidence happens. Emily tells me that one of her favorite teachers used to pit her and one of the other sopranos in the studio against each other. I apparently respond with an incredulous look because Emily quickly explains why her teacher's strategy was so effective:

You're so willing to jump through whatever hoops they put in front of you. You're like, "Tell me what I need to do to have a career. Just tell me and I'll do it. Seriously. Tell me and I'll do it." [...] And you're so

bewildered when it works for somebody and doesn't work for you. (31 May 2014)

In this way, a shift occurs between the student singer and the professional singer. Clara views her moment of prohibition as negative, whereas Cooke and Pulley recognize that regulation, on any level, is necessary in order to maintain their status as employable singers. It is a slow process, but singers come to understand moments of prohibition part of their identities as singers.

How Singers Relegate Others

In Euro-classical opera and training, authority figures are often the singers trained in the tradition. Emily Pulley makes an apt observation about Euro-classical vocalists: "the thing about opera singers is that we're taught to be so self-aware" (31 May 2014). To employ Rahaim's idea of a pamparic body, singers' self-regulating scrutiny is simultaneously internal and external. In fashioning themselves in the way of a Euro-classical opera singer, they enforce that behavior for other aspiring singers.

After Clara tells me the story about the strapless dress, she describes how she now regulates other singers' appearances. In the following excerpt, Clara is both sure that critiquing her dress was wrong, and sure that it was necessary to her development as a singer.

CLARA. And um...and yeah, that was the last time...I ever...y'know, ever probably sang in something sleeveless without some sort of cover. Um...And that's probably why – I've. I mean, that's

probably why I'm such a stickler to other people too, so I'm
kinda a hypocrite about what you should wear when you sing.
Because...it can overshadow your voice. Apparently. [...]

HANNAH. I mean, wow.

CLARA. Yeah...it's strange how you can learn to deal with critiques on
your voice, and come to understand that as a positive – even
though it hurts – as a positive way to grow.

HANNAH. Right.

CLARA. But...a critique like that – on your, on your dress or how you
look, it's just...you can't...you can't convince yourself that it
was a positive thing in anyway.

HANNAH. No. I'm havin' trouble

CLARA. Yeah. [...] I mean, I should've known better, but I was pretty
young, and uh...

HANNAH. But the way you told it, it was like you made the decision to
do it because it was inhibiting your movement...

CLARA. [I did?] yeah...

HANNAH. like it was proving detrimental to your performance.

CLARA. (not sure) Yeah. Like, either i-it was inhibiting, I was hot,
something happened...

HANNAH. Sure – so, your own comfort...

CLARA (warily) Right

HANNAH. ...or the integrity of your performance

CLARA. Right... (5 August 2014)

Clara recognizes the paradoxical situation of her not enjoying people critiquing her, but still critiquing other people. She reconciles this with the fact that “apparently” appearance matters because an authority figure (singing teacher, judge) deemed her body “inappropriate.” In the fashion of a singer, Clara’s perception of the event shifts the more I prompt her to think about it. She begins to question her previous narrative, saying, “I should’ve known better.” Even when I remind her of how she narrated the story seven minutes previously, she does not quite accept that she truly took her cardigan off for a valid purpose. Langellier and Peterson describe how persons can speak with the voice of an institution, citing how people may use the “voice of medicine” when telling stories about illness (2004, 19). Clara makes sense of her narrative about her own body regulation through how she regulates other singers’ bodies. She concedes that in some way, her body in that dress inhibited her musicianship. Consequently, she wants to prevent other singers from making the same mistake.

Sasha Cooke indirectly explains the pretense with which Euro-classicism restricts bodies; a musician must realize the music above all else. In other words, a musical abstraction remains at the top of the Euro-classical hierarchy. Like the voice manuals I analyze in the previous chapter, Cooke considers singers’ daily practices affecting their performance of the repertoire.

I think of how important it is that everything you do, even from your early high school days, is contributing to what you’ll become. So my

advice is to fill your life with good things, do things that excite you, find other areas outside of music that fill your person. All of it will contribute to your music-making. (Cooke 2012)

Interviewers frequently ask professional singers what advice they would give to aspiring singers. Cooke's answer reflects the sentiment at the heart many singers' replies: Euro-classical singing both is and is not all about the music. Even as Cooke encourages singers to find self-fulfillment outside the professional world of music, the interviewer's question frames Cooke's supposedly freeing sentiment as yet another maxim singers must embrace in order to become better musicians. In another interview she gave a year later, the author paraphrases Cooke's advice as "By putting aside negative thoughts, taking stock of your abilities, and focusing on the music, you can cultivate a generous spirit that will serve more than just your own career" (Keil 2013, 27). As I explain previously, Cooke is speaking to a wider audience in these quotes, so her answers are polished and appeal to the mission of the publication, which in this case is *Classical Singer*, a magazine for aspiring professional singers. According to Cooke and the publications, singers eschew negative thoughts and evaluate themselves by focusing on the music. Harkening back to Foucault, this constructs "the self [as] that which one can reject" (1988, 22). Cooke's and the publication's hybrid remarks use the same reason for restriction: the music.

In the vein of serving the music, I ask Emily Pulley if she believes there are different aesthetic standards depending on a singer's voice type. She describes her own aesthetic preferences when it comes to Euro-classical singing.

HANNAH. Do you think that's more necessary for sopranos to...make it
[singing] look effortless?

EMILY. I pref- again, I consider it to be debris. i-i-i-if it's something that
takes you out of the story (long pause and false start) I find it to
be distracting, if suddenly it's like, it's all about the singing. I
mean there's som- there are moments, y'know, when it's 'balls
to the wall,' y'know- just (makes crunching sound with throat to
evoke "effort"). I'd rather see guys do that, kind of thing. If it's,
y'know, if it's two women singing together, (vocal creak) I-I
usually prefer it to be pretty elegant and, um, I dunno. It's just
my personal preference. There are other, obviously, people who
feel...differently about that. (31 May 2014)

Emily is sure to let me know that this is her personal preference, but her personal
preference speaks to a larger gendered divide in the preferred vocalities of male and
female voices. "I consider it to be debris" is one of her favorite ways to describe all the
accouterments that, in her opinion, compromise the narrative of a song or opera. In this
anecdote, she struggles in describing her own aesthetic preferences, which differs
depending on the sex of the singing body. Her repeated "y'know" signals something she
finds universal, or at least something unnamable that she knows I, as a fellow singer in
her tradition, can understand. The "elegance" and "effortlessness" she mentions recalls
training manuals' prohibition of the chest and belt voices, voices male singers feel
permitted to use (Hines 1997, xxii-xxiii; Miller 1996, 242). Emily describes an aesthetic

preference so embodied, that it was not fully accessible via words in this moment. She also emphasizes that these are *her* personal preferences and recognizes that there are others who do not agree. Langellier and Peterson elaborate on this crisis of authority: “In storytelling, we ask what qualifies someone to tell a story, for example, to speak for herself or himself from the ‘authority of experience,’ or to speak for others as an expert” (2004, 20). Emily shows hesitancy here in doing that, possibly because she cannot describe why she feels this way (and I do not prompt her). Shortly after, I ask Emily about the time she spent teaching in graduate school and how teachers must not let their past experiences affect their students. Of course, this is impossible.

HANNAH. What do you think creates all those issues in the first place?

EMILY. Oh my gosh! What all our teachers told us! Oh my gosh! I can

hear it. so clearly in my head, or I can see it so clearly in front of me on my jury sheet, or y’know, competition ballot, and y’know those things *never* go away [...] We don’t learn through positive reinforcement a lot of the time. (31 May 2014)

Recalling Clara’s NATS experience, I think about how singers learn to embody critique, feeling that critique is negative, but necessary to realizing their musical potential. When singers reflect on the restrictive practices of their tradition, they make sense of hurtful moments as constructive and then impart that knowledge to other singers. This legacy of restrictive critique is not linear, but rhizomatic, with singers simultaneously constructing and being constructed by the diva shadow image.

“The Diva” and How Singers Understand Themselves

Singers are very acutely aware of the popular image that all opera singers are “divas,” but Euro-classical singers learn to use “diva” to describe narcissism and contempt for the music rather than virtuosity. They refer to themselves as “divas” primarily in jest, and use the term to insult other singers. I use the term “diva” to mark how discourses of training differ from discourses of opera fandom. Being a “diva” means partially eschewing the mandates of one’s tradition for personal gain. In this way, the gendered restrictions of Euro-classicism only help a singer to become successful to a certain degree. After that, the rules may give a singer a sense of integrity, but they do not give her starring roles in big opera houses.

Clara has a conflicted relationship with the diva image. I ask her if she prefers to sing in choirs or on her own, and she replies that she prefers solo performance.

CLARA. Um, there’s people that really really love singing in choir,
there’s people who really love performing on their own, and I’m
sure there’s people who love both... [...] but...as a personal
preference, I like to be able to- just focus on what I’m doing to
perform, what my voice is doing to perform, and not having
to... deal with all the other voices and...everythi- that sounds
really diva-like, but...

HANNAH. (overlapping, laughing) No!

CLARA. (overlapping, laughing) It’s just- it’s just- (sarcastic, throwing
arms wide in a mock-gesture) ME!

HANNAH. (laughing) Do you feel guilty...that you think that way?

CLARA. A little. Yeah- a little bit [...] I um... the whole idea of a diva has always been a strange one to me because...um... I was always told- I-I-I was told- Another thing I was told at [the Christian university] was that I was not... (speeding up) I was not gonna make it in the opera world because I was not enough of a diva. And... a part- and y’know, I think there’s- I- I think “diva” has kind of become synonymous with prima donna, and and- (starting a word, not finishing) a-a-a bit bitchy.... (2 August 2014)

Clara later describes not being able to have a professional singing career as “not having the hide.” For Clara, singing alone is the ultimate introspection because the only person she must monitor is herself. She feels guilty about this, calling the idea of diva “strange” in that it partially goes against the rule-following. A singer cannot break all the rules, however: just enough to make her acceptably different. Being a diva means learning how to be a strategic bitch.

Sasha Cooke describes diva behavior, but never uses the word “diva” in any of her published interviews in print or video recording. In the following piece of a New York Times article, interviewer Vivien Schweitzer asks Cooke about singers complaining about career trouble.

SCHWEITZER. Are singers too quick to assign blame for career problems?

COOKE. A successful singer has to have a gut reaction with teachers and a very grounded sense of what is and isn't working, and constantly evaluate that. Everyone has an opinion, everyone tells you how you should look and what you should sing. You do have to say, "Yes, maestro" and follow a director, but you should have a sense of self. It's never good to blame people, as you were part of the equation. (Cooke 2014b)

Cooke does not use the word "diva" in order to safely navigate Schweitzer's possibly volatile question. She focuses her answer by saying a singer must balance between listening to herself and listening to others. Cooke settles, however, settles on listening to others because "you were part of the equation." It is also possible that the editor cut her response there. She does not elaborate on how a singer navigates the treacherous waters between "assertive" and "bitchy," and that strait is narrower for women in opera than it is for men.

Fortunately, Emily Pulley picks up where Cooke leaves off. She explains to me how frustrating it can be when a singer in a higher position is "not prepared" for rehearsal. I note that I am the one to bring up the term "diva."

EMILY. It's like when somebody's playing by a different set of rules and that's ok [...]

HANNAH. Is that's what's considered diva behavior?

EMILY. (quickly) It depends on who you ask. (slower) Some people would say: "This person: isn't so great that she takes such good

care of herself? And that she's constantly looking out – she's protecting her own interests, and, she knows what's right for her, and so she makes sure that she is allowed to make those decisions.” And then you, um, ask the director, and you say, “this person is completely inflexible, she's unwilling to try my ideas,” [...] so it depends on your perspective. [...] My definition of a diva is somebody who can only perform under ideal circumstances, and she decides what those circumstances are.

HANNAH. That's really good. (31 May 2014)

There are two profound happenings with pronouns in Emily's explanation. First, Emily, like Cooke, focuses on both sides of a singer's responsibility, but she places herself in the role of the audience or public, and then in the role of director; she even says “you” rather than “he,” “she,” or “they,” which brings the director's perspective closer than that of the audience. Second, she transitions from using the gender-neutral “this person” to using the gendered pronoun “she” to answer my question about diva behavior. In my second chapter, I discuss the always already gendered implications of divadom, but Emily confirms this. Briefly after this section of the interview, she continues, “the minute it becomes about you and not about...the music and about the audience...you've completely defeated the purpose...” (31 May 2014). Her opinion on singer behavior echoes that of the training manuals, as well as many years of training: a singer should perform the music, not the self.

Euro-classical singings do not call themselves “divas;” they use the term to refer to singers who deviate from what is expected, who trust themselves more than others, and who insist on breaking or bending the rules. Nevertheless, as Clara suspects and Emily Pulley implies, a singer cannot completely follow the rules and succeed. This is one of the reasons why I cannot consider Euro-classical training as separate from opera culture. The entire system is a vortex of singers restricting singers in the name of music. Even as singers reject the label “diva,” the amorphous image of the opera diva remains the distant realization of all this is efficacious about being an opera singer.

Conclusions: The End of the Diva

As my interview with Emily draws to a close, I ask how opera can be more inclusive. She replies, “I think we need more rep. And I think we need more imagination. Y’know...the fat-shaming and ageism....It’s really ha[rd]- I mean, fat people aren’t supposed to fall in love. Old people aren’t supposed to fall in love. It’s like – does it all come down to porn?” (31 May 2014). Euro-classical singers constantly compare themselves to the image of the opera diva. Clara Johnson, Sasha Cooke, and Emily Pulley, though in different stages of their careers, continue to name their training as an important part of their sense of self. I consider their narratives within the Euro-classical vocal institution. In such a lengthy tradition, these narratives may not seem very important. By focusing on narrative as performance via Langellier and Peterson, these utterances gain meaning. I best understand these narratives by thinking in terms of a Euro-classical paramparic body conveyed through texts, singers’ interactions with other

singers, with teachers, and with people who attend Euro-classical concerts. These narratives convey the lived experience of three Euro-classical singers, and I re-consider normative responses about singing in the context of the restrictions of Euro-classical vocal pedagogy.

In this thesis, I present a theory of diva performativity which an opera singer reiterates every time she sings. “Diva” began with the castrati. When the castrato fell out of style, women *en travesti* started playing breech roles. In the absence of castrati bodies and voices, audiences and opera houses fetishized and spectacularized the female body and voice. Opera’s perceived spectacularization actually derives from the loss of the gender fluid castrato, in whose shadow the diva resides. Therefore, it is easy for a female-bodied singer to exude excess. Consequently, voice training manuals urge female singers to regulate their bodies, and ultimately renounce their bodies. These texts discursively construct singing as a heteronormative practice; vocal crossing is dangerous for female singers. Even in the context of a queer opera history and listening experience, training manuals promote a hyper-feminized way of singing as the only healthy option for female singers. My three interlocutors echo training manual rhetoric through their own experiences of restriction, and their subsequent enactment of regulating other singers’ bodies and voices. They also do not consider themselves opera divas; the singers who break the hierarchy of performer and text are divas. As my interlocutors imply, opera wants singers to break the rules, but it does not train them to do so. Euro-classical training actually does the opposite. I call attention to the Foucauldian ruptures

in the construction of divadom. In doing so, I interrogate the gendered discourses within Euro-classical vocal pedagogy.

When Clara and I talked about what happened with Tara Erraught at Glyndebourne, I keep mentioning how it was five male critics who questioned the integrity of an opera production based on a singer's size. Finally, Clara responds:

And I mean, you don't want to turn it into – me personally – I don't want to turn it into a sexism thing, but what else do you *think*? What else *can* you think? [...] And in some ways...you go into singing because you think in terms of...an art form, and your body being your instrument, you're- you're *safer* in some regard because you're generally not judged by how...y'know...how...your *weight* or how your body is built. You're judged by your voice. And the world is showing that... that's clearly not the case in opera anymore. And I guess - I guess I always had thought that about opera, that it didn't matter how you were built – there was always going to be a part for you. (long pause) So I guess there was always a part of me that thought opera was a...safe...place. (5 August 2014)

I never press Clara about the idea of opera as a “safe place.” I never really asked myself to interrogate this idea either until this project. Like Emily Pulley and Sasha Cooke, Clara believes that opera was once a utopia; people used to care about the *music* rather than how the singers looked. Though this has never been true, perhaps this is the story singers need in order to perform.

¹ The second alto (Alto II) is the lowest female voice in a choir, if the choir divides into more than four parts. In general, the more divisions in a choir, the more advanced the choir is.

² Pulley cites Pat Misslin and Diana Soviero as teachers who have had a huge vocal influence on her. She also describes the practice of locating oneself as a singer through one's teacher as distinctly American. She says, "I get twitchy when I see people trying to put those categories where they aren't necessarily" (31 May 2014). Sasha Cooke also directly mentions her teachers (Cooke 2013; Cooke 2012; Keil 2013).

³ Nina Eidsheim writes about her experience of a voice teacher classifying her sound as "Korean" because of Eidsheim's cheekbones (2008, 28-9). She uses this experience to illustrate and then interrogate vocal categorization based on race or ethnicity.

REFERENCES

- Abbate, Carolyn. 1991. *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Abbate, Carolyn and Roger Parker. 2012. *A History of Opera*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Allegri, Renzo and Roberto. 1998. *Callas by Callas: The Secret Writings of 'la Maria'*. New York: Universe Publishing.
- André, Naomi. 2006. *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Baldy, Colin. 2010. *The Student Voice: An Introduction to Developing the Singing Voice*. Edinburgh, UK: Dunedin Academic Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1985. "The Phantoms of the Opera." In *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, 183-187. New York: Hill and Wang.
- . "The Grain of the Voice." 1977. In *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath, 179-189. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Brooks, Peter. 2000. "Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera." In *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, edited by Mary Ann Smart, 118-34). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Christiansen, Rupert. 2014. "Glyndebourne 2014: Der Rosenkavalier, review." *The Telegraph*, May 18. Accessed September 20, 2014.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalconcertreviews/10839018/Glyndebourne-2014-Der-Rosenkavalier-review.html>.
- Clark, Andrew. 2014. "Der Rosenkavalier, Glyndebourne, East Sussex, UK – review." *Financial Times*, May 19. Accessed September 20, 2014.
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/d135e9dc-dce3-11e3-b73c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz32XrbZBux>.

- Clément, Catherine. 2000. "Through Voices, History." In *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, edited by Mary Ann Smart, 17-28. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 1988. *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women*, translated by Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Cook, Nicholas. 2008. "We Are All Ethnomusicologists Now." In *The New (Ethno)musicologies*. Edited by Henry Stobart, 48-70. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press.
- Cooke, Sasha. 2014a. "Sasha Cooke Looks Back." YouTube video, 1:23, posted by "Claudia Friedlander," December 3.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQqPauyGiVU>.
- . 2014b. "A Songbird Finding Strength in Her Nest: Sasha Cooke Talks About Self-Image, Family, and Gut Instincts." By Vivien Schweitzer, January 31.
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/arts/music/sasha-cooke-talks-about-self-image-family-and-gut-instincts.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&_r=2.
- . 2012. "Interview with mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke." By Elijah Ho, July 24.
<http://www.examiner.com/article/interview-with-mezzo-soprano-sasha-cooke>.
- Cooper, Michael, Anthony Tommasini, and Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim. 2014. "Too Much Looking, Not Enough Listening? New York Times Critics Respond to Glyndebourne 'Fat' Reviews." *The New York Times*, May 22. Accessed May 22, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/23/arts/music/new-york-times-critics-respond-to-glyndebourne-fat-reviews.html>.
- Cousins, Mark, and Athar Hussain. 1984. *Michel Foucault*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Cowgill, Rachel, and Hilary Poriss. 2012. Introduction to *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Edited by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, xxvii-xlvi. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Crico, Giandonato. 2000. *Maria Callas: Hall of Fame*. Rome, Italy: E. Gremese Editore.
- Cusick, Suzanne. 1999. "On Musical Performances of Gender and Sex." In *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*. Edited by Elaine Barkin, Lydia Hamessley and Benjamin Boretz, 25-48. Zürich: Carciofoli.

- Eidsheim, Nina Sun. 2008. "Voice as a Technology of Selfhood: Towards an Analysis of Racialized Timbre and Vocal Performance." PhD diss., University of California San Diego.
- Fales, Cornelia. 2002. "The Paradox of Timbre." *Ethnomusicology* 46(1): 56-95.
- Foucault, Michel. 2003 [1977]. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In *The Essential Foucault: Selections from The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*. Edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose. 351-369. New York: The New Press.
- , 1988. "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. 16-49. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- , 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Galatopoulos, Stelios. 1998. *Maria Callas: Sacred Monster*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Griffin, Farah Jasmine. 2004. "When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality." In *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies*. Edited by Robert G. O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. 102-125. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hadlock, Heather. 1993. "Peering into 'The Queen's Throat'." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5(3): 265-75.
- Hamera, Judith. 2007. *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference, and Connection in the Global City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harrison, Peter T. 2006. *The Human Nature of the Singing Voice: Exploring a Holistic Basis for Sound Teaching and Learning*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.
- Hines, Jerome. 1997. *The four voices of man*. New York: Limelight Editions.
- Howell, Ian. 2013. *VC566 Advanced Vocal Pedagogy: Teaching Singing*. New England Conservatory Boston, MA.
- Keil, Amanda. 2013. "Meet Sasha Cooke." *Classical Singer* 26(6): 18-27.

- Kerlin, Jerry. 2011. *Kodály Summer Institute Voice Pedagogy Syllabus*. New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions, New York, NY.
- Kimball, Carol, and Richard Walters. 2001. *The French song anthology*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corp.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne. 1993. *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*. New York: Poseidon Press.
- . 1991. "The Queen's Throat: (Homo)sexuality and the Art of Singing." In *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Edited by Diana Fuss, 205-234. New York: Routledge.
- Langellier, Kristin M, and Eric E. Peterson. 2006. "The performance turn in narrative studies." *Narrative Inquiry* 16(1): 173-80.
- . 2004. *Storytelling in daily life: performing narrative*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Larsen, Robert L., Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, et al. 1991. *Arias for soprano*. New York, NY: G. Schirmer.
- Leonardi, Susan J., and Rebecca A. Pope. 1996. *The Diva's Mouth: Body, Voice, Prima Donna Politics*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Levine, Lawrence W. 1988. *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- McClary, Susan. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McGinnis, Pearl Yeadon, and Marith McGinnis Willis. 2010. *The Opera Singer's Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- McKinney, James C. 1982. *The Diagnosis & Correction of Vocal Faults*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.
- Meizel, Katherine. 2011. "A Powerful Voice: Investigating Vocality and Identity." *Voice & Speech Review* 7(1): 267-74.
- Midgett, Anne. 2014. "Male critics on female bodies: Tara Erraught, Liza Minnelli and intelligent reviewing." *The Washington Post*, June 6. Accessed September 20,

2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/male-critics-on-female-bodies-tara-erraight-liza-minnelli-and-intelligent-reviewing/2014/06/05/ba13bc8a-eb51-11e3-b98c-72cef4a00499_story.html.
- , 2007. "The Voice of American Opera." *The Opera Quarterly* 23(1): 81-95.
- Miller, Richard. 1997. *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German, and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- , 1996. *On the Art of Singing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mordden, Ethan. *Demented: The World of the Opera Diva*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1984.
- Olwage, Grant. 2004. "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13(2): 203-26.
- Perlmutter, Donna. 1989. "Ewing's Acting Strength on Stage and Off." *Los Angeles Time*, April 18. Accessed October 5, 2014. http://articles.latimes.com/1989-04-18/entertainment/ca-1967_1_maria-ewing-salome-stiff-upper-lip.
- Poriss, Hilary. 2009. *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pullen, Kirsten. 2005. *Actresses and Whores: On Stage and in Society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rahaim, Matthew. 2012. *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Reich, Nancy B. 1993. "Women as Musicians: A Question of Class," In *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*. Edited by Ruth Solie, 125-148. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Risi, Clemens. 2011. "The Diva's Fans: Opera and Bodily Participation." *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 16(3): 49-54.
- Saya, Virginia, Richard Walters, Ludwig van Beethoven, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Johannes Brahms, et al. 2003. *The Lieder anthology*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard.
- Schechner, Richard. 1985. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Schlichter, Annette. 2011. "Do Voices Matter? Vocality, Materiality, Gender Performativity." *Body & Society* 17(1): 31-52.
- Simon, Peter C. 2012. *Voice Syllabus*. The Royal Conservatory Toronto, ON Canada.
- Shepherd, John and Peter Wicke. 1997. *Music and Cultural Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smart, Mary Ann. 1995. "The Lost Voice of Rosine Stoltz." *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*. Edited by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, 169-89. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Strauss, Richard, Maria Ewing, Michael Devlin, Kenneth Riegel, Edward Downes, Derek Bailey, and Oscar Wilde. 1992. *Salome music drama in one act*. [S.l.]: Covent Garden Pioneer.
- Striny, Denes. 2007. *Head First, The Language of the Head Voice: A Concise Study of Learning to Sing in the Head Voice*. Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books.
- Titze, Ingo R. 1994. *Principles of Voice Production*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Tolbert, Elizabeth. 1988. "The Musical Means of Sorrow: The Karelian Lament Tradition." PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles.
- Traunmüller, Hartmut and Anders Eriksson. 1995. "The Frequency Range of the Voice Fundamental in the Speech of Male and Female Adults." Department of Linguistics, University of Stockholm. Available via http://www2.ling.su.se/staff/hartmut/f0_m&f.pdf.
- Tsioulcas, Anastasia. 2014. "In 2014, The Classical World Still Can't Stop Fat-Shaming Women." *NPR Music*, May 20. Accessed September 20, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/deceptivecadence/2014/05/20/314007632/in-2014-the-classical-world-still-cant-stop-fat-shaming-women>.
- Turino, Thomas. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Voigt, Deborah. 2008. "Deborah Voigt: The Return of the Little Black Dress." YouTube video, 2:44, posted by "21Cmediagroup," May 22. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQqPauyGiVU>.
- Ware, Clifton. 1998. *Basics of Vocal Pedagogy: The Foundations and Process of Singing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Weheliye, Alexander G. 2005. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wenner, Debby. 2013. *Vocal Pedagogy and Lab*. George Mason University College of Visual and Performing Arts Department of Music, Fairfax, VA.
- Wilson, Alexandra. 2012. "Galli-Curci Comes to Town: The Prima Donna's Presence in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Edited by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, 328-47. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wood, Rachel. 2011. *Undergraduate Vocal Pedagogy*. Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Bloomington, IN.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2005. *On Female Body Experience: 'Throwing Like a Girl' and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.